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The Educational Ideas of Louisa May Alcott

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THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAS OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine a selection of Louisa May Alcott's writings and exposit on the educational ideas existent in them. Since Louisa May Alcott's writings have not been previously examined with reference to their educational implications, this study investigates a hitherto unexplored facet of her contribution to American letters and education.

Preface

Chapter I: NEW ENGLAND TRANSCENDENTALISM.

The first chapter defines New England Transcendentalism and embodies it through presentation of the lives of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott. Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Alcott's representative expressions of Transcendentalism's theology and philosophy, nature mysticism and social criticism, and educational theory and practice are to be taken as background for the succeeding chapters of this study.

Chapter II: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT.

This chapter presents Louisa May Alcott's education and life among the New England Transcendentalists, and her Civil War and women's rights activities. Those of Miss Alcott's writings which are most relevant to this study are introduced in this presentation in chronological order.

Chapter III: EDUCATIONAL IDEAS.

Chapter Three is introduced by an examination of the factual and fictional elements in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. The essentials of the plots of each book are given along with quotations which are selected for their didactic and educational significance and importance.

Chapter IV: RELEVANCE.

The fourth chapter puts the educational ideas found in Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys into historical perspective, cites points of agreement between them and New England Transcendentalism, and discusses their personal and social relevance.

Chapter V: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY.

This chapter summarizes the main points of the dissertation and Louisa May Alcott's educational ideas, and offers a suggestion for further research.

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Preface

This dissertation examines Louisa May Alcott's writings and exposits on the educational ideas which they contained. Since Louisa May Alcott's writings have not been previously examined with reference to their educational implications, this dissertation investigates a hitherto unexplored facet of her contribution to American letters and education. The procedure used in this study is the historical method wherein primary and secondary sources are exposited and analyzed. The author is grateful for the assistance provided by the staffs of the Chicago Public Library, the Evanston Public Library, the Lewis Towers library of Loyola University of Chicago, Northwestern University library in Evanston, and the Newberry Library in Chicago.

The first chapter of this study defines New England Transcendentalism and analyzes it through the contributions of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott. Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Alcott's representative expressions of Transcendentalism's theology and philosophy, nature mysticism and social criticism, and educational theory and practice are the background for the succeeding chapters of this study.

The primary source used to define New England

Transcendentalism was Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Transcendentalist," while the secondary source utilized was Henry David Gray's Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of Its Chief Exponent, a veritable repository of descriptions. Emerson's essay is used as a primary source because, as Gray indicated, he was one of Transcendentalism's chief expounders. Gray's work is a doctoral thesis done under the direction of the Columbia University Faculty of Philosophy. The definition also includes this author's visual representation of Louisa May Alcott's satirical analogies between philosophy and Transcendentalism and ballooning.

Ralph L. Rusk's definitive The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson is the secondary source used for Emerson's biography, while Arthur Christy's The Orient in American Transcendentalism; A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott, Sherman Paul's Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience, and Louis Tenzis's "Emerson's Approach to God" are the secondary sources used to present Emerson's theological and philosophical position. Rusk, Paul, and Christy are scholars in the field; Tenzis's work is an unpublished doctoral dissertation approved by the Loyola University of Chicago Faculty of Philosophy. Thoreau's life, his nature mysticism and social criticism are taken from Joseph Wood Krutch's Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings, Sherman Paul's Thoreau's Inward Exploration, and Lawrence Wilson's "Thoreau on Education." Krutch and

Wilson are scholars; Wilson's essay is especially useful for direct quotations from Thoreau on education. Alcott's life is taken from Franklin B. Sanborn and William Torrey Harris's A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy and Odell Shepard's The Journal of Bronson Alcott. It is noteworthy that Sanborn and Harris knew Bronson Alcott and that their two volume work, published five years after his death, is probably the first biography done of him. Sanborn and Harris's and Shepard's works include copious extracts from Alcott's writings. Shepard precedes each chapter with commentary while Sanborn and Harris link the excerpts with exposition. Alcott's educational theory and practice are taken from Dorothy McCuskey's Bronson Alcott, Teacher, a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of doctor of philosophy at Yale University. McCuskey's work received the third research award of one thousand dollars offered by Kappa Delta Pi, an honor society in education, for the best study on a single phase of the history of American education.

Chapter II presents Louisa May Alcott's life and education among the New England Transcendentalists, and her Civil War and women's rights activities. Those of Miss Alcott's writings which are most relevant to this study are introduced chronologically in this chapter. The primary sources used for Louisa's biography are her "Transcendental Wild Oats--A Chapter from an Unwritten Romance" and Ednah Dow Cheney's Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, Journal. "Transcendental Wild Oats," which was first published

in Silver Pitchers, is a satirical account of Louisa's participation in her father Bronson Alcott's utopian experiment in communal living at Fruitlands. Cheney knew Louisa and her memoir, published in 1889, is probably the first biography done of Miss Alcott, who died in 1888. Louisa's letters and journal entries are arranged in chronological order and are connected by Cheney's commentaries. Each chapter begins with a poem written by Miss Alcott, the exception being the first chapter poem written by her father; the book concludes with a poem written by her friend Ralph Waldo Emerson. Chapter II of this study includes Louisa's best poem, "Thoreau's Flute," which was written as a commemorative to her friend Henry David Thoreau. Madeleine B. Stern's scholarly Louisa May Alcott, which was expedited by a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation grant, is used as a secondary source. Seth Curtis Beach's Daughters of the Puritans: A Group of Brief Biographies and We Alcotts: The story of Louisa M. Alcott's family as seen through the eyes of "Marmee," mother of Little Women by Aileen Fisher and Olive Rabe are not used because Beach's book is superficial and Fisher and Rabe's is superfluous. Also included in this chapter is a montage which portrays Louisa May Alcott up in the clouds with the transcendental balloon over Walden Pond.

Chapter III is introduced by an examination of the factual and fictional elements in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. These stories are

the primary sources of Miss Alcott's educational ideas. Comment is made on Louisa's frequent references to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and the correspondence between an episode in Little Men and William Godling's Lord of the Flies is pointed out. Synopses of the plot and sub-plots are presented as are direct quotations which have educational and didactic significance. The similarity between Miss Alcott's curriculum and that of the early twentieth century progressive educators is noted as is the resemblance between Louisa's fictitious students and those that Pestalozzi taught at Stans. This chapter also includes an illustration of an episode from Little Women.

The fourth chapter begins with a survey of the universal and perennial appeal which Little Women enjoys and gives some of the reasons for its continued popularity. An analogy is drawn between Peanuts, Pogo, Little Orphan Annie, and Mary Poppins and Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys; brief observations are also made on nineteenth century writing style and Miss Alcott's departure from conventional form. The educational ideas found in Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys are put into historical perspective, their personal and social relevance are examined, and points of agreement between Louisa's ideas and Platonism, New England Transcendentalism, and Existentialism are noted. The most useful secondary sources used in this chapter are Thomas Woody's authoritative A History of Women's Education in the United States, and "Bill bars aid to sex-biased med schools," and "Must Women's Colleges

Go Coed to Survive?," newspaper articles which are useful because they provide essential contemporary information.

Chapter V concludes the dissertation by summarizing the main points of the study. In this chapter Louisa May Alcott's life, education, and relationship to the New England Transcendentalists is encapsulated and Transcendentalism's impact on Louisa is commented upon. David E. Smith's analysis of Little Women is refuted and used as a foil to point out the contradictions, paradoxes, and educational utopianism in Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. Louisa's utopianism is extrapolated, her subjectivism is explained, and her range from early child to higher education is generalized. Her idea that the teacher is a model is described and her ideas on aesthetic education are reviewed. A suggestion for further research ends the paper.

At this point I would like to express my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to Dr. Gerald L. Gutek, Chairman of the Foundations of Education, who inspired and directed this dissertation from a seminar paper. Dr. Gutek's suggestions and guidance were most helpful. I also thank Dr. Rosemary V. Donatelli, of the Foundations of Education, and Dean John M. Wozniak, of the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago, for their assistance in preparation of the manuscript. I am also indebted to The Delta Kappa Gamma Society for The A. Margaret Boyd International Scholarship, and the School of Education of Loyola University of Chicago for graduate assistantships.

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CHAPTER ONE

NEW ENGLAND TRANSCENDENTALISM (1836-1847)

* * *

"New England Transcendentalism" is a term applied to the various phases of Idealism which found expression in New England, during, roughly, the second quarter of the nineteenth century among a minority group of intellectuals and activists, who had a disproportionate number of noisy camp followers.[1] The theoreticians and practitioners of the various forms of Idealism were known as the "New England Transcendentalists." The New England Transcendentalists were philosophers, religious leaders, writers, poets, essayists, mystics, teachers, and social reformers. Many of the Transcendentalists were extremely liberal Unitarian ministers who were as much interested in literature, philosophy, or social reform as in the church. Some were on their way out of the church or even out of Christianity itself. Generally speaking, the

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[1]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in The Transcendentalist Revolt Against Materialism, ed. by George F. Whicher (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1949), p. 18. (Hereinafter referred to as Transcendentalist Revolt.) And Henry David Gray, Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of Its Chief Exponent (2nd ed.; New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 7, 9. (Hereinafter referred to as Transcendentalism.)

Transcendentalists were seekers after truth and were impatient of restraint by any creed.[2]

The New England Transcendentalists were members of the Transcendental Club, the Town and Country Club, and the "Saturday Club" or the "Atlantic Club." The Transcendentalists also met at Amos Bronson Alcott's School of Philosophy in Concord, Massachusetts. Louisa May Alcott, Bronson Alcott's daughter, is said to have written the following untitled verse as a commemorative to the School of Philosophy which met for the first time in 1879 in Bronson Alcott's Orchard House, irreverently dubbed Apple Slump by Louisa May.[3]

> Philosophers sit in their sylvan hall
> And talk of the duties of man,
> Of chaos and cosmos, Hegel and Kant,
> With the Oversoul well in the van.
>
> All on their hobbies they amble away,
> And a terrible dust they make;
> Disciples devout both gaze and adore,
> As daily they listen and bake.[4]

Louisa occasionally attended the lectures at the Concord School of Philosophy, but, the poem notwithstanding, did

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[2]Sherman Paul, The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 5. (Hereinafter referred to as Thoreau's Inward Exploration.) And Ralph L. Rusk, The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 244-245. (Hereinafter referred to as Life of Emerson.)

[3]Ibid., p. 503; and Phillips Russell, Emerson, The Wisest American (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1929), p. 293.

[4]Attributed by Russell to Louisa May Alcott, in Russell, Emerson, p. 293.

not care for the theoretical musings of "Hegels in straw hats."[5]

The Transcendental Club met for the first time on September 19, 1836 in Boston at the house of George Ripley, who later launched the utopian Brook Farm experiment in communal living. The Transcendental Club was originally known as the "Symposium," as its founders called it in honor of Plato. Outsiders dubbed it the Transcendental Club and that name stuck. The second meeting was held in October of that year at Amos Bronson Alcott's house in Boston. Alcott wrote the names of sixteen members of the Club in his "Autobiographical Collections." Among those named were Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth P. Peabody, Theodore Parker, Jones Very, Frederick Henry Hedge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Alcott himself.[6]

The Transcendental Club was succeeded by the Town and Country Club, which was organized in 1849. This club was followed by the "Saturday Club" or the "Atlantic Club," which met at Theodore Parker's house as well as other places. It was probably this last club that Louisa May

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[5]Louisa May Alcott, Journal, July 1882, in Louisa May Alcott: Her Life, Letters, Journal, ed. by Ednah D. Cheney (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890), p. 346. (Hereinafter referred to as Louisa: Her Life.) And Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 314.

[6]Rusk, Life of Emerson, p. 243; and Franklin B. Sanborn and William T. Harris, eds.; A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy (2 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), I, 239. (Hereinafter referred to as Bronson Alcott.) And Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. viii.

Alcott visited in 1872. Louisa described it as "a funny mixture of rabbis and weedy old ladies, the 'oversoul' and oysters." She went on to say that her father, Bronson Alcott, and "B. flew clear out of sight like a pair of Platonic balloons." She also said that she could not follow them though she tried.[7]

Louisa May Alcott was not the only one who could not follow the metaphysical speculations of the New England Transcendentalists. The Transcendentalists were criticized, and justifiably so, for expressing their doctrines in highly abstract and vague terms, which were incomprehensible even to the learned. Their obscure pronouncements were accompanied by eccentric behavior which ran the gamut from communal living to hermitage. Consequently, New England Transcendentalism became the name applied to whatever was unintelligible, and whatever lay beyond the realm of common sense in thought, language, or behavior.[8]

New England Transcendentalism was described as a movement in religion, literature, and conduct.[9] Transcendentalism was referred to as an enthusiasm, a wave of

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[7]Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Abigail May Alcott, 1872, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 268; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, II, 459, 464-465, 486.

[8]Gray, Transcendentalism, pp. 7-8, 14.

[9]Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 9.

. . . the picture, still more impressively brings the images of the imagination in connexion with the understanding . . .

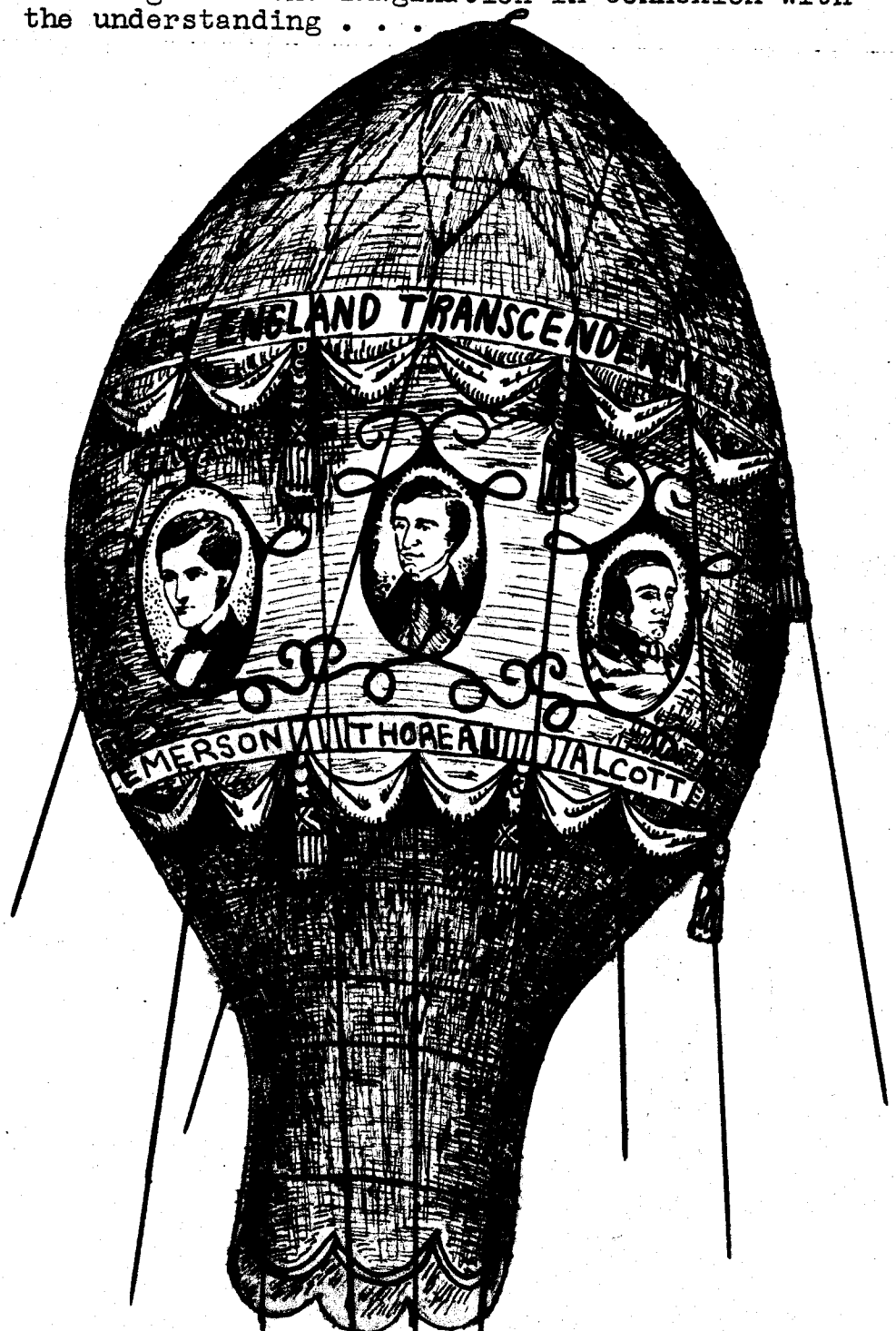

Figure 1. The foregoing quotation is from Amos Bronson Alcott, "Infant Instruction," in Essays on Education (1830-1862) by Amos Bronson Alcott, ed. by Walter Harding (Gainseville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1960), p. 14.

sentiment, and a breadth of mind.[10] It was labeled as a gospel,[11] an expression of religious faith,[12] and a Saturnalia or excess of Faith.[13] Transcendentalism was termed a Renaissance of conscious, living faith in the power of reason, and in the reality of spiritual insight.[14] Sanborn and Harris alleged that it was an emancipation of the soul from prosaic bondage.[15]

New England Transcendentalism was declared a wave of reform,[16] a challenge, a revolt,[17] a protest, and a search for principles.[18] Transcendentalism was identified as an outgrowth of American democracy,[19] and an extreme expression of religious liberty.[20] It was stated that

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[10] Octavius Brooks Frothingham, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 9.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Charles J. Woodbury, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 9.

[13] Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 21.

[14] Francis Tiffany, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 12.

[15] Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, II, 596.

[16] John Orr, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 9.

[17] Gray, Transcendentalism, pp. 9, 11.

[18] Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 7.

[19] Catholic World, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 14.

[20] Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 14.

Transcendentalism was a development in the history of the Unitarian Church, an outgrowth of Unitarianism into which certain imperfectly understood elements of German Idealism were implanted, and at the same time an attack upon Unitarianism's fundamental principles.[21]

New England Transcendentalism was called an intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual ferment, not a strictly reasoned doctrine.[22] Henry Clarke Goddard maintained that Transcendentalism was a blending of--whatever else as well-- Platonic metaphysics and the Puritan spirit.[23] Transcendentalism was categorized as an intuitional philosophy, a sort of mystical Idealism built on Pragmatic premises, a Pragmatic mysticism,[24] and Idealism made practical.[25]

Goddard depicted New England Transcendentalism by taking the lives of those he considered Transcendentalism's leaders as its embodiment.[26] In the following sections

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[21]Attributed by Cooke to W. D. Wilson, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, pp. 10-11, 14.

[22]Tiffany, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 12.

[23]Henry Clarke Goddard, quoted in Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 14.

[24]Gray, Transcendentalism, pp. 8-9, 14.

[25]Caroline Wells Dall, Transcendentalism in New England (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1897), p. 23.

[26]Gray, Transcendentalism, pp. 7-8, 14.

of this chapter a similar course will be pursued by presentation of the cameo portraits of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott, respectively portrayed as New England Transcendentalism's theologian-philosopher, nature mystic and social critic, and educational reformer. The first profile presented will be that of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an ordained Unitarian minister, was born in Boston on May 25, 1803 into a family that had eight generations of ministers. His father was a Unitarian minister and his mother and aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, were both devout Calvinists. His father died when Ralph was eight and he was cared for by his mother and his aunt, who became almost a second mother to him.[27]

Emerson was admitted to Harvard college, which was Calvinist before it turned Unitarian, in 1817 at the age of fourteen. The Harvard college library was a storehouse of the older Puritan writings and Emerson read them intently. Emerson was a member of a little book club which purchased the more important English magazines and reviews, and it may be through these that he first became acquainted with

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[27]Gray, Transcendentalism, p. 25; and Louis Tenzis, "Ralph Waldo Emerson's Approach to God" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, 1970), p. 7. (Hereinafter referred to as "Emerson's Approach to God.")

the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Samuel T. Coleridge.[28] During Emerson's third year at Harvard he was mainly concerned with Socrates, and knew Plato and Xenophon as his biographers. He came upon the Neo-Platonists, was introduced to the Orient through literature and lecture, and read Francis Bacon, Locke, Montaigne, and Hume among others as school studies. Carpenter asserted that Emerson's first published work, Nature, shows strong suggestions of his Neoplatonic reading.[29]

Emerson was graduated in August 1822, and began teaching in a school which belonged to his brother William, who had established it in their mother's home in Federal Street, Boston. This was not Ralph's first teaching job; during his freshman year at college he worked as a tutor. One of his private pupils was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, whom he tutored in Greek. He habitually seized upon vacations and leaves of absence from college as opportunities to earn

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[28]Rusk, Life of Emerson, p. 73; and Tenzis, "Emerson's Approach to God," p. 10. Coleridge has been regarded by some as having introduced German Transcendentalism into England, and by others he is regarded as more specifically a Platonist. Carlyle preached the need for nonconformity, self-reliance, and the values of solitude. See Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, p. 20.

[29]Arthur Christy, The Orient in American Transcendentalism; A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 2-3. (Hereinafter referred to as Orient in Transcendentalism.) And F. I. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 74.

money by teaching.[30]

In 1823 the Emerson family left Boston and went to the part of Roxbury which was at that time a temperately rough and wooded countryside. Emerson and his brother continued teaching in a schoolroom which was a little farther than two miles from the little farmhouse in which they lived. On December 5, 1832 William left for Germany to study divinity at Göttingen, Germany, and Ralph was left in charge of the school. He re-established the School for Young Ladies in a back room of Trinity Church in Boston. Emerson had no heart for school-teaching; it was merely a means of earning money to add to the family funds and to assist his younger brother through college.[31]

Emerson closed his school in January, 1825 and was formally admitted to Harvard Divinity School on February 8, 1825. He presented his first sermon to the Middlesex Association on October 10, 1826 and won his license to preach. He traveled, preached, studied and accepted the call to Second Church Boston where he was ordained on March 11, 1829. He was pastor there until his resignation on October 28, 1832.[32]

Neither Calvinism nor Unitarianism satisfied Emerson. He felt that rigid Calvinism, which took as its

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[30] Rusk, Life of Emerson, pp. 86, 91.

[31] Ibid., pp. 98-109.

[32] Ibid., pp. 117-137.

principle man's deep liability to sin, was too pessimistic; and Unitarianism, which ran to the other extreme of man's boundless capacity for virtue, was too optimistic. He sought a middle way between these two extremes. He felt that each sect had preserved part of the integral Christian message but had distorted the rest. Emerson decided that natural intelligence along, not specially historically given Christian revelation, could properly ground moral and religious beliefs. He turned from formal institutionalized religion and developed from a traditional believer in supernatural revelation to a self-reliant believer in a natural religion which emphasized natural living for personal revelation of God's will.[33]

Emerson developed a unique philosophic procedure but was not a philosopher in the usual academic sense because his philosophy is not a technical one. He drew much from the essences of various idealisms, mysticisms, pantheisms, and Platonisms, and is said to have found much material favorable to his system of ideas in Oriental books. His Oriental reading list included the Persian poets Hafiz and Saadi, whose writings are characterized by nature mysticism; the code of Menu, Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucious, Mencius, the Vedas, the Koran, Calidasa, the Vishnu Sarna, and the Bhagavat Gita. It was stated by

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[33] Tenzis, "Emerson's Approach to God," pp. 2-4.

Karier and Carpenter that Emerson's Over-Soul, a term coined by him, originated in Neo-Platonism; and by Christy that it paralleled the doctrine of the Hindu Supreme Cosmic Brahmin. Along with other Transcendentalists Emerson promulgated Oriental ideas in The Dial, the Transcendentalists' journal.[34]

Emerson read Plato; among the classical Neo-Platonists, Plotinus, Proclus, Prophyry, Iamblicus; among the Cambridge Neo-Platonists, Cudworth; several German romantics such as von Schelling and Goethe; the mystic Swedenborg; and Hegel and Kant. It has often been said that the German philosophers Hegel and Kant were philosophically the precursors of New England Transcendentalism. In Emerson's case the facts do not seem to bear this out. Carpenter asserted that the two references to Kant in Emerson's journals indicate no more than Emerson's awareness of Kantian philosophy, not discipleship. Emerson stated that the term "Transcendentalism" came from Kant, but he attributed the origins of Transcendentalism to an Idealism which predated Roman times. Tenzis maintained that Emerson found Hegel too abstract and preferred to glean Hegel's notions from works by his followers, those

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[34]Christy, Orient in Transcendentalism, pp. 9-13, 20; and Clarence Karier, Man, Society, and Education: A History of American Educational Ideas (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967), p. 53. (Hereinafter referred to as American Educational Ideas.) And Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, pp. 75, 248.

of Victor Cousin for example.[35]

Sherman Paul referred to Emerson's philosophy as a subjective Idealism which holds every external fact as a spiritual fact, a fact of consciousness, and an issue of mind. Fact, then, is unconscious mind, to make it conscious, to transform the external into the internal, is the function of man, the way to self-culture, to his own mind and the mind of God. Emerson held reason to be synonymous with the soul itself. He held to a reliance on man and trust of nature in general. Emerson's belief in self-reliance, simplicity, and the primacy of living comprise the positive exposition of his philosophic procedure. His doctrines of simplicity and the primacy of living, which became the doctrine of full dependence upon the experience of living, connects him to Pragmatism; while his emphasis on the self links him to Existentialism. Undergirding these doctrines was an optimistic position which Emerson held to in spite of personal tragedies and the realities of slavery and Civil War.[36]

Emerson traveled to Europe from December 25, 1832

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[35] Ibid., p. 96; and Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 21; and Tenzis, "Emerson's Approach to God," p. 96.

[36] Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 117. (Hereinafter referred to as Emerson's Angle of Vision.) And Rusk, Life of Emerson, pp. 115, 203; and Tenzis, "Emerson's Approach to God," pp. 32, 54.

to October 7, 1833, and met Carlyle and Coleridge. From 1833-1834 he lectured on natural history and may be said to have begun his career as a platform theologican-philosopher. From 1833-1851 he lectured on such topics as great men: Michelangelo, Martin Luther, Plato, Montaigne, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Goethe, Swedenborg, John Milton, George Fox, and Edmund Burke; on English literature, philosophy, the philosophy of history, human culture, human life, politics, reforms, religion, education, nature, Transcendentalism, and the Over-Soul.[37]

Ralph Waldo Emerson held the distinction of being New England Transcendentalism's leader. Though he was considered as such, still he was a very private person. He rejected the experimental collectivism of his day, and was not a member of either the utopian adventure at Ripley's Brook Farm or Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands experiment. Emerson was in favor of the abolition of slavery but did not devote his entire energy to the promotion of any single reform. He had a fear of institutions and sought no disciples and formed no cult.[38] His relationship with Henry David Thoreau was not that of master and disciple,

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[37]Stephen Wicher, Freedom and Fate; An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. xiii-xv.

[38]Ralph Henry Gabriel, "Emerson and Thoreau," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, pp. 60-61; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 175, 238; and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Jacksonian Democracy and Literature," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 13.

but, among other things, that of teacher and pupil. Their association as well as Thoreau's role as New England Transcendentalism's nature mystic and social critic is presented next in Thoreau's profile.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Henry David Thoreau was born July 12, 1817 in the rural village of Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau's father had wandered unsuccessfully from storekeeping to schoolmastering and back to storekeeping again. He set up a lead pencil home industry, while Thoreau's mother operated a boardinghouse to aid the family finances. Thoreau prepared at the Concord Academy, and, at great sacrifice to his family, entered Harvard college in 1833.[39]

In the preparation for the competitive life that Harvard provided, Thoreau did not prove himself an exceptional student. He seemed to have determined to use the college's facilities in his own way. He read widely and declined to compete for class rank. While at Harvard Thoreau read Emerson's Nature, Transcendentalism's manifesto, which proposed and urged a return to the springs of Idealism; and had Jones Very, a minor Transcendental poet who took to mysticism, for his tutor in Greek. During his junior year, while he taught school at Canton,

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[39]Joseph Wood Krutch, et., Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings A Bantam Classic (7th ed.; Bantam Books, Inc., 1962), p. 7. (Hereinafter referred to as Thoreau.) And Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, pp. 2-3, 24.

Massachusetts, he lived with Orestes Brownson. Brownson had come down from the hills of Vermont preaching universal salvation and political socialism, and became a Transcendentalist publisher. When Thoreau returned to college, his essays took a Transcendental direction. Sixth in his class at the end of the first term of his sophmore year, he dropped to twenty-third in his junior year and graduated nineteenth in a class of forty-five in 1837. This was not because he was a poor student but because of a long illness, an inability to satisfy composition requirements, and a preference for the modern languages which ranked lower.[40]

For two weeks in September, 1837 Thoreau taught in Concord's town school. He gave up his position because he was unwilling to punish pupils by whipping. He made several attempts in the following year to gain employment as a schoolmaster. In March he sought a teaching post in Kentucky. In April he was willing to accept a position in Alexandria, Virginia. Early in May he traveled to Bangor, Maine for the same purpose. In June he and his brother opened a school of their own in the old Parkman house in Concord. He taught for three years and at the end of April 1841 went to live with the Emersons' and thereby

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[40] Ibid., pp. 2-4, 26; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 265.

gained the best possible kind of graduate study.[41]

At the Emersons', Thoreau performed the office of a younger brother or grown-up son. He worked with Emerson in the garden and as a hired man for his room and board. Emerson learned gardening from his junior, and Thoreau learned the Transcendental craft from Emerson. Emerson pruned the budding poet's work and gave Thoreau almost free rein with editorship of The Dial. Thoreau seems to have been taken for granted, "superserviceable, the perfect Transcendental handyman, combining manual and intellectual skills." He was everyone's helper, and the Emerson and Alcott children's friend.[42]

Emerson provided the few acres Thoreau needed for his Walden experiment and on Independence Day in 1845, he began the account of his residence there. Thoreau's experiment in natural living at Walden was the authentication of Emerson's Nature by practice. Emerson did not know nature as Thoreau did--his relation to nature was theoretical, he loved it at a distance and homiletically, while Thoreau's Orient-tinged naturalism was an actual interaction. Thoreau wished by means of his intimacy with nature to live an uncommitted life open to spirit.

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[41]Lawrence Wilson, "Thoreau on Education," History of Education Quarterly, II (1962) 19.

[42]Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, p. 96; and Madeleine B. Stern, Louisa May Alcott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 20-21.

Thoreau's journal record of this experience ran to thirty-nine manuscript volumes and became the principal archive of his arduous experience of assimilating nature to himself.[43]

Thoreau was chiefly interested in self-cultivation and self-determination; and was rated by Emerson as an incarnation of self-reliance. He was an inner-directed man who felt no need for the good opinion of society. He was a reformer through persuasion and example. For Thoreau good government began at home; social ethics were personal ethics, and the most valuable reform was self-reform. The self was to be discovered, developed, and perfected in nature and natural education. The civilized man was immured in the city, debarred from natural influences. He was the slave of things and formal education was learning not wisdom.[44]

Thoreau considered the natural education of the American Indian far superior to formal institutionalized learning. He thought learning civilization's creature, but not essential to the perfect man. In the seventh of his "Indian Notebooks" he quoted in detail a story told by

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[43] Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, p. 143; and Christy, Orient in Transcendentalism, p. 233.

[44] Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, pp. 46, 246. Louisa May Alcott's "real wisdom" seems to be in essential agreement with Thoreau's concept of wisdom. See Louisa May Alcott, Jo's Boys, Collier Books (3rd ed.; New York: The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1962), Chap. xvii.

Benjamin Franklin of the meeting of a Swedish clergyman with an assemblage of Susquehana chieftains, to whom the cleric preached about Adam and Eve and their fall by eating an apple. At the conclusion of the sermon one of the Indians arose to thank the clergyman for his courtesy in coming so far to tell those things and proceeded to tell the legend of the origin of maize, kidney beans, and tobacco. When the missionary scornfully rejected the Indian's religious doctrine as mere fable and falsehood, the dignified Indian is reported to have replied,

> My brother, it seems your friends have not done you justice in your education; they have not well instructed you in the rules of common civility.
>
> You saw that we, who understood and practice those rules, believed all your stories--why do you refuse to believe ours?[45]

For Thoreau the education of the Indian far surpassed that of the clergyman.[46]

Thoreau maintained that nature and health were opposed to society and decay, and he turned to nature to repudiate the expediency and uniformitarianism of society. However, Thoreau did not relinquish civilization for primitivism but hoped to keep civilization open on one side and available as a source of spiritual inspiration and refreshment. It is a very great mistake to think of Thoreau as a

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[45]Henry David Thoreau, quoted in Wilson, "Thoreau on Education," p. 29.

[46]Ibid., p. 24.

mere romantic primitivist who wanted to become a Noble Savage. Neither is he to be considered a Robinson Crusoe. The cabin at Walden was only a mile and a half from the center of Concord and only a half a mile from the main road leading to it. Thoreau had many visitors, and often walked into the village. Thoreau never planned Walden as a permanent way of life; it was an experiment in simple living.[47] Thoreau said that he went to the woods because he wished to:

> . . . live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived . . . I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there.[48]

He left in September 1847 and went again to the Emerson house where he lived for a year while Emerson was in Europe.[49]

As a social critic Thoreau is most noted for his famous essay entitled, "Civil Disobedience," which was published in 1849. The essay was originally given as a lecture which was precipitated by Thoreau's imprisonment for failure to pay his poll tax while he lived at Waldon Pond. For a number of years Thoreau had refused to pay his poll tax (though he did pay his other taxes) on the ground that it was

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[47]Krutch, Thoreau, p. 7.

[48]Henry David Thoreau, quoted in Krutch, Thoreau, p. 8.

[49]Krutch, Thoreau, p. 9.

exclusively for the benefit of a government of which he did not approve. This refusal had passed unnoticed until shortly after the outbreak of the Mexican War. It was perhaps on account of tensions caused by the war that he was put under arrest and clapped into a village jail along with a barn-burner. He was released the next day when a female member of the Thoreau household paid the tax without his consent. "Civil Disobedience" is the essay which deeply affected Tolstoy, and from the title of which Gandhi took the name of his own movement in favor of civil disobedience.[50]

"Civil Disobedience" was Thoreau's defense of the private conscience against majority expediency and announced the moral intransigence of later essays such as "Slavery in Massachusetts," an address Thoreau delivered at the Anti-Slavery Convention on July 4, which was published in 1854. This was followed by those essays written in behalf of John Brown, the fiery abolitionist who carried the political faith of the Transcendentalists to the conclusion of bloody action at Harper's Ferry, and "Life Without Principle," which was published in 1863.[51]

Thoreau lectured from 1838 to 1860 and organized the lecture series at the Lyceum in Concord from 1838 to 1840 and again in 1842, 1843, and 1845. He was never a successful lecturer because of his subject matter. Most of

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[50] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[51] Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, pp. 240-243.

his lectures were those of the excursionist. He passed his life pretty much as he began it in his first few years out of college, never having been more than a village teacher, a surveyor, a seldom wanted lecturer, and a small manufacturer of pencils and graphite. As a writer he hardly troubled the literary currents of his time.[52]

While Henry David Thoreau was at Walden Pond he was visited by his friend Amos Bronson Alcott. Alcott and and Thoreau were both interested in the cause of abolition, and were probably among those present at meetings of the Transcendental Club when it met in Ralph Waldo Emerson's study in Concord. Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott shared books and ideas and were moved by the common spirit of New England Transcendentalism. Along with other Transcendentalists Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott proposed a purposeful, developing life of spiritual culture and self-aggrandizement, the self in metaphysical terms. They asserted that a specially educated elite trained to interpret scripture and think correctly was not necessary. Their source of the Absolute was the conscience of God in man, the moral sense.[53] Bronson Alcott, Transcendentalism's educational leader,

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[52] Ibid., p. 18.

[53] Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism Vintage Books (New York: Random House, Inc., 1969), p. 13; and Paul, Thoreau's Inward Exploration, pp. 2, 22; and Rusk, Life of Emerson, pp. 244-245; and Odell Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938), p. 141.

thought that education could develop self, conscience, and morality. The theories he held and the methods he used are examined next.

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888)

Amos Bronson Alcott was born November 29, 1799 on a farm at Spindle Hill, near Wolcott, Connecticut, a small village about twenty miles north of New Haven. On this farm three generations of Alcotts had lived and died before him. The men of the district where Alcott was born were half artisans and half farmers. Alcott's father was such a man; he was a carpenter-farmer. The fortunes of the Alcott family were such that Amos, like other farmers' boys in New England, was early enlisted in the family labors.[54]

When Bronson Alcott was five years old he attended a district school in which he learned his A B C's from Noah Webster's spelling book. From the age of six to ten he attended a crossroads school that had a single room, twenty-two feet long by twenty broad and seven feet high, with his cousin William Andrus Alcott. In this school Alcott learned to read and write and spell. He learned his catechism by heart and made some acquaintance with the New

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[54]Sandford Salyer, Marmee: The Mother of Little Women (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 6-7. (Hereinafter referred to as Marmee.) And Katharine Anthony, Louisa May Alcott (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1938), p. 7.

Testament.[55]

Alcott and his cousin were avid readers and together they canvassed the neighborhood to see what books remained of a Parish library in Wolcott. In the cupboards and on the mantel-pieces of their friends and relatives they found the stock pieces of culture -- Milton's Paradise Lost, Young's Night Thoughts, Cowper's Works, Thomson's Seasons, De Foe's Robinson Crusoe, and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. McCuskey asserted that they valued Pilgrim's Progress over the others and read it, re-read it, copied it out, and dramatized it.[56]

In 1813, when Alcott was about thirteen, he was sent to Cheshire to stay with his maternal uncle, the Reverend Tillotson Bronson, principal of the Cheshire Academy. Alcott assisted his uncle as an errand boy and attended the district school. He might have gone to his uncle's theological school, and perhaps ultimately become a clergyman, but at the end of about a two month period he became homesick and oppressed by the show of learning and the demeanor of his classmates.[57]

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[55]Odell Shepard, Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1937), pp. 5, 7, 9. (Hereinafter referred to as Pedlar's Progress.

[56]Dorothy McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 11.

[57]Ibid., p. 13; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 19, 25.

He went home to the farm at Spindle Hill. His father put him to work at the Hoadley clock factory in Plymouth about two miles from Spindle Hill. The dull routine of the factory depressed him and he was allowed to quit and return home. For three months, in 1815, he attended the school of the local pastor where he studied arithmetic and grammar and gave much attention to writing. He also attended the district school for a short time when it was being taught by his cousin William May. This terminated his formal education.[58]

Besides farming and the factory there were two other possibilities open to Alcott, peddling and teaching. He chose peddling and sold John Flavel's A Treatise on Keeping the Heart. Next he decided to try school teaching and was recommended by his uncle the Rev. Tillotson Bronson. The Wolcott School Committee granted him a license with no difficulty; however, they did not hire him to teach any of the schools in the district. Therefore, he continued peddling and hoped to find a school.[59]

Alcott spent four or five years in all peddling through Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. In April and May of 1822, at Warrentown, Virginia Alcott taught a Writing School. In the winter of 1823 he taught his first

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[58]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 13; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 22, 24.

[59]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 14.

Connecticut school in the Fall Mountain district of Bristol where he received ten dollars a month and board. He opened a school similar to his Warrentown writing school in Wolcott in the fall of 1824, and in the winter term of 1824-1825 he was back in Bristol, this time at the West Street School, with his salary increased to fifteen dollars a month and board.[60]

In the spring of 1826 Alcott went to teach at the Centre School in Cheshire where he remained for four successive terms. At his own expense Alcott furnished the schoolroom and bought many books for the use of pupils and parents. He read Pestalozzi's Hints to Parents, Robert Owen's New View of Society, and the Bible. At this time Alcott abandoned all belief in the doctrine of Original Sin, in the Holy Trinity, and the Divinity of Jesus. He took Jesus as a man and teacher and as his chief model for his own life and teaching. In June 1826 he quit teaching at the Centre School on account of opposition to his methods and ideals. He retumed to Spindle Hill where he reread John Locke and corresponded with William Maclure concerning Pestalozzi.[61]

Alcott left Spindle Hill for Bristol where he again taught at the Centre School for the winter term of 1827-1828. Because of revived opposition to Alcott's teaching methods

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[60] McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 19-20.

[61] Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, pp.3-4.

his engagement was not renewed. He then went to Boston and opened the Salem Infant School where he worked with his future wife, Abigail May. Alcott left the Infant School and opened a school for boys, which was first located on Commons Street and later moved to Tremont Street. He married Abigail May, closed his Tremont School, and left Boston in 1830 to teach in Germantown, Pennsylvania with his friend William Russell. A female department of the Germantown Academy was opened and Russell taught the young ladies while Alcott taught the little children.[62]

Teaching in Germantown never captured Alcott's imagination, nor did it occupy much of his time for he had only five pupils. His primary attention was centered on his reading, philosophical conversation with his friend William Russell, and observation of his daughters, Anna and Louisa May, both born in Germantown. Alcott observed his first born so that he might discover the birth of Soul, and the foundations of character. He failed to find his answer with Anna, and tried again with Louisa. McCuskey asserted that Bronson Alcott did not discover much about the origins of Soul from Louisa either.[63]

Alcott's school in Germantown dwindled and was closed

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[62]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 51, 56-57; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 8.

[63]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 57, 62-63.

in the spring of 1833. Alcott left his family in Germantown and went to Philadelphia where he opened a school and used the facilities of the Philadelphia libraries for his independent studies. In both his Germantown and Philadelphia schools Alcott emphasized the psychological and moral aspects of the instruction rather than the communication of knowledge. The school day was passed chiefly in conversation. Alcott closed his Philadelphia school and brought his family to Boston where he began the ill-fated Temple School, and met Ralph Waldo Emerson for the first time.[64]

Bronson Alcott started the Temple School with thirty children, between the ages of three and twelve, who came from the upper social class and represented a variety of religious backgrounds. There were Unitarians, Calvinists, Baptists, Swedenborgians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Universalists, and even Free Enquirers. Alcott hoped to add a Quaker and a Catholic so that all creeds could be represented.[65] Almost half of the group were girls, a circumstance which Alcott felt was:

> . . . favorable to the exertion of a pure moral influence on the formation of character, and preserving the social relations unbroken

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[64] Ibid., pp. 57-58; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 34.

[65] McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 84; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 177.

during the impressionable period of life.[66] Elizabeth P. Peabody assisted Alcott, and taught arithmetic and Latin. Her sisters--Sophia, who married Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Mary, who married Horace Mann--also assisted in the school, as did Margaret Fuller. Alcott's wife, Abigail, was in charge of music and was the financial manager.[67]

Bronson Alcott's Transcendentalism exphasized extreme individualism and the common spirituality of all in nature. In his teaching he strove to awaken the consciousness of the children and help them develop their powers of intuition. He wanted them to know themselves that they might be better social beings. He encouraged the children to the fullest inner development and imaginative expression.[68]

Alcott talked with the children about their own moral qualities. They talked about conscience, obedience, love, and faith. There was no separation between mental and moral training, between character education and any other kind of education. Alcott felt that no activity of a child's life was apart from its character, so he

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[66]Amos Bronson Alcott, Diary, Sept. 22, 1834, in Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 178.

[67]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 93, 96; and Honore Willsie Morrow, The Father of Little Women (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927), pp. 100-101.

[68]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 85, 86.

deliberately planned exercises valuable from both points of view. Self-analysis, biography, and journal writing, all bearing on the skillful use of language, were also vital parts of the character training as well. No subject was taught as an end in itself; all the work was directed toward the realities of social living in accord with the communal ideal.[69]

Elizabeth Peabody made a record of Alcott's conversations with the children at the Temple School. She edited the transcripts which were published in a volume entitled, The Record of a School, in 1835. The book was full of interesting and novel Socratic and Platonic matter. Miss Peabody also transcribed Alcott's conversations with the children on the gospels of the New Testament. Alcott edited these and the first volume of the two volume work entitled, Record of Conversations on the Gospels held in Mr. Alcott's School, Unfolding The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture, appeared in December 1836. During the autumn of 1836 a whispering campaign began and in February, when the second volume was published, the wrath of Boston came down on Alcott and his Temple School.[70]

In the Conversations with Children on the Gospels Alcott asserted as a general principle that education is the

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[69] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

[70] Ibid., p. 91; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 186; and Shepard, Pedlar's Progress, pp. 191, 204.

art of revealing to one the true idea of being and one's endowments, and of fitting one to use these for growth, renewal, and perfection. Alcott maintained that through the study of the New Testament the true idea would be revealed and growth, renewal, and perfection could be accomplished. He conducted his conversations with children on the gospels on the theory that man, being a creation of God, could know Him directly, and that children were the best witnesses of the true nature of God since they had most recently come from the divine source. Alcott insisted that man can enjoy an original relation with God without the intermediary of revealed religion or its expounders. He asserted that all men were divine, in the sense that all shared in the nature of God. Although Alcott set Jesus up as the epitome of perfection, he denied his special divinity and regarded him as a great and good man who realized to a superlative degree the possibilities inherent in all men.[71]

Publication of the Conversations with Children on the Gospels made it plain that Alcott was stimulating his pupils to independent thinking in religious matters. The sale of the books was at first rapid, but was soon stopped by unfavorable statements in the newspapers. Various Boston newspapers, which did not stop short of personal abuse, attacked the books and called them blasphemous and

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[71]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 98-99.

heretical. The upholders of revealed religion considered Alcott and his books immoral and dangerous, and the Boston Courier suggested that Alcott be indicted for blasphemy.[72]

The Conversations with Children on the Gospels were also criticized for being indecent and obscene. The charges arose from a discussion of the nativity of Jesus, parturition, and how souls assume bodily form. One boy believed that bodies came out of the ground and lay about on the earth waiting for souls, which came directly from God to live in them. None of the children seemed to have any idea of the physical aspects of birth, and Alcott, instead of remaining silent and drawing a veil as most parents and teachers did during that era, discussed the questions very gently. He emphasized the joy of mothers over the birth of a baby and phrased his answer in poetical and mystical terms. Boston objected to even this much of what might have been considered sex education, preferring the "purity" of ignorance instead.[73]

Morrow stated that the hue and cry in the papers aroused the public to such an extraordinary degree that a mob descended on the Temple School, and went on to portray a melodramatic scene in which Alcott and his five year old

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[72] Ibid., p. 98; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 80.

[73] McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 102; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 80; and Shepard Pedlar's Progress, pp. 185-186.

daughter Louisa May faced the mob and dispersed them by command. McCuskey asserted that a mob threatened to attack Alcott's Friday evening conversations with Sunday School teachers, but some forewarning was received and the meeting was called off. Shepard stated that popular feeling ran so high for a while that Alcott was hooted in the street by children.[74]

People withdrew their children from Alcott's Temple School, and in April 1837, he sold the school furniture to pay off his debts. He moved what was left from his schoolroom upstairs in the Masonic Temple into the basement of the building. Alcott's health gave under the strain and during July and August he rested at the seashore and at Emerson's house in Concord. In September 1837 he was down to six pupils in his basement Temple School. By June 1838 he had only three pupils. He shut down, and in October of that year opened a school at his home on Beach Street with fifteen pupils. Sanborn and Harris stated that during that month Alcott admitted a little colored girl to his school, and that the full effect was not experienced until the following year. Shepard asserted that the negro child was admitted in June and that the parents of Alcott's white pupils demanded her dismissal. Alcott refused to dismiss the black girl; and by about

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[74]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 104; and Morrow, The Father of Little Women, pp. 193-194; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 80.

June 22, 1839 he had only five pupils left: his own daughters Anna, Louisa May, and Elizabeth, his friend William Russell's son, and the negro girl. Alcott closed this, the last of his regular schools, at the end of June 1839.[75]

Bronson Alcott was viewed as an interloper into the field by both the clergy and the school teachers in Boston. Neither group approved of his theories and practices. Alcott saw himself as more than a schoolmaster. He wanted to bring about the regeneration of man through his noble plans for education. About twenty years passed before he was again involved in the educational enterprise. In the meantime he held conversations, lectured, traveled, and experimented in communal living. In May 1859, he was chosen Superintendent of the Concord Public Schools, a job which he took very much to heart. He put a lot more into his work than he was paid for, and frequently visited all the schools of the township. He went on foot and walked many miles a day, and spoke to the children whenever he could. Alcott served for about five or six years in that capacity, and was pained by loss of the Superintendency in April 1865.[76]

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[75]Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 227; Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, pp. 81, 97, 110; and Shepard, Pedlar's Progress, pp. 205, 208-210.

[76]McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 23; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, pp. 312, 324, 342, 369; and Shepard, Pedlar's Progress, p. 204.

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The foregoing portrayals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott were made in order to bring New England Transcendentalism into sharper focus. Emerson's, Thoreau's, and Alcott's representative expressions of Transcendentalism's theology and philosophy, nature mysticism and social criticism, and educational theory and practice are to be taken as background material for the succeeding chapters of this study. This seems appropriate since it was into New England Transcendentalism's ambience that Louisa May Alcott was born and in which she lived and formulated her educational ideas. Louisa's life will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT (1832-1888)

* * *

Louisa May Alcott lived mainly in Boston and Concord, Massachusetts. Her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, in 1837 when the Phillistines were in full cry against the Temple School, was spoken of generally as the leader of the New England Transcendentalists. This title was soon afterwards given to Ralph Waldo Emerson,[1] who was a close friend of the Alcott family. Louisa's family circle of friends included New England Transcendentalism's Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau. From an early age Louisa was exposed to expressions of New England Transcendentalism's theory and practice.[2]

The span of Louisa's life coincided with the era of Horace Mann and the common school movement. In 1838, when Louisa was five or six years old, Mann was appointed

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[1]Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 175, 238.

[2]Louisa May Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 31, 51; and see Louisa May Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats--A Chapter from an Unwritten Romance," from Silver Pitchers (1876) in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, pp. 95-105. (Hereinafter referred to as "Transcendentalist Wild Oats.") And Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 59; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 20-21.

Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. At that time there was no state supervision, control or influence over the system of decentralized town, district, and private venture schools.[3] There were also no compulsory attendance laws. Louisa was educated at home by her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, her mother, Abigail May Alcott, a tutor, and two governesses. She also received instruction in a school kept in Emerson's barn and intermittently attended two district schools.[4]

Education

Bronson Alcott was involved with the care and observation of Louisa and her sister Anna while they were still in their infancy, and he began their education at a very early age. Louisa reminisced that she and her sisters went to their father's study where they learned to read and write and had their lessons. Her earliest recollections were of playing with books, building houses and bridges of the big dictionaries and diaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages whenever pen or pencil could be found.[5]

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[3]See Gerald Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), pp. 49-70; and Karier, American Educational Ideas, pp. 43-66.

[4]Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 29-30; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 19-21, 35, 40-41, 47-50.

[5]Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 27-29.

Bronson Alcott taught the alphabet by contorting his body and laying on the floor drawing letters with his long arms and legs. Alcott read stories and fairy tales to Louisa and her sisters with a skill which Louisa described as having been peculiarly his own. Pilgrim's Progress was a family favorite, and Miss Edgeworth's Moral Tales, Krummacher's Parables, "Jack the Giant-Killer," and "Cinderella," made the reading hour the pleasantest of the day. Later on, when they were able, the girls made long lists of words to be spelled, written, and understood. On Sundays there was a simple service of Bible stories, hymns, and conversations about the state of their little consciences and the conduct of their childish lives.[6]

During the years of Bronson Alcott's ill-fated Temple School, the Alcott family occasionally spent some weeks at Scituate, a suburb of Boston. While there, Alcott often had lessons for his daughters in the garden. He always drew their attention to Nature and used little symbolical pictures to illustrate his lessons; sometimes he made drawings himself.[7] Louisa described her father as having,

> . . .taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child's nature, as a flower blooms rather than crammed it, like a Strasburg goose,

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[6] Ibid., pp. 29-31; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 21.

[7] Ibid.

with more than it could digest.[8]

Louisa's father's "wise way" was the Socratic method, which was essentially what Alcott used in each of his schools. The aim of his conversational method was the development, or unfolding, of the child's powers of intuition, consciousness, awareness, and imaginative expression. The children were not forced, or "crammed," and each was encouraged to participate in dialogue and share his and her ideas and insights with the others.

Louisa reported a lesson received from her mother at Alcott's Temple School. The occasion for the instruction was her fourth birthday celebration. Louisa was passing out little cakes when she saw that by error one was short of the number of children remaining to be served. She held on to the last one until her mother said,

> 'It is always better to give away than to keep the nice things; so I know my Louy will not let the little friend go without.'[9]

The little friend got the last cake and Louisa received a kiss from her mother as a reward for mastery of her first lesson in self-denial.[10]

After the closing of Bronson Alcott's Temple School, Louisa and her sisters were among the few pupils taught at

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[8]Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 29.

[9]Ibid., p. 27.

[10]Ibid.

home by her father. Alcott began holding conversations in parlors for pay and struggled along with teaching and conversations for about a year after which he shut down his school. The Alcott family moved from Boston into the Hosmer cottage in Concord where three months later Louisa's sister, Abba May, was born. Her sister Elizabeth, who was named after Elizabeth Peabody, was born during the Temple School days, as was a son who did not survive.[11]

While the Alcott family lived at the Hosmer cottage Louisa began to attend a school kept by Miss Mary Russell in Emerson's barn for his children. From Mary Russell Louisa learned reading, writing, and games. Thoreau was transcendental handyman at Emerson's during this time, and the friend and companion of the Emerson and Alcott children. Thoreau took the children on nature walks and studies in the woods, on berry picking excursions, and on boating trips on the Concord River. Thoreau was a hero, teacher, and elder brother all in one to Anna, Louisa, and little Beth.[12]

Bronson Alcott had been corresponding with English educational reformer James P. Greaves for several years; and in 1842, with Emerson's financial backing, he traveled to

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[11]Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 10; and Richard L. Herrnstadt, ed., The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott (Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1969) p. xxiii; and Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, I, 227; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 138.

[12]Shepard, Pedlar's Progress, p. 298; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 19-21.

England to meet him and visit Alcott House, which was founded by Greaves and patterned after Alcott's theories. When Alcott returned to Concord he brought Charles Lane, a businessman turned idealist, and Henry Wright, who taught at Alcott House, with him. Alcott and his friends had a scheme for communal-living with which they wanted to experiment. To that end, in May 1843, Lane bought the Wyman Farm, with the deed made out in Emerson's name as trustee for Lane. The Wyman Farm was renamed, "Fruitlands," because fruit was to be the principal staple of daily food. The Consociate Family Living community of Fruitlands was established at about three miles from the village of Still River, thirty miles from Boston, and scarcely twenty miles from Concord. The term "consociate living" meant a communal, monogamous, and egalitarian life style. Emerson and the Concord circle of friends came and went.[13]

The original members of the Fruitlands community, besides the Alcott family, which consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Alcott and their four daughters, Anna, Louisa May, Elizabeth, and Abba May, were the following: Abraham Everett, Charles Lane and his son William, for a short time H. C. Wright; Isaac T. Hecker, afterwards known as Father Hecker, head of

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[13]Herrnstadt, The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott, pp. xiii-xxiv; and Father Isaac T. Hecker, quoted in Clara Endicott Sears, comp., Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915), p. 20. (Hereinafter referred to as Fruitlands.) And Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, II, 376; and Sears, Fruitlands, p. 20; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 138; and Shepard, Pedlar's Progress, pp. 319-320, 328, 332.

the Paulist Brotherhood and editor of The Catholic World; Christopher Greene and Samuel Larned; Joseph Palmer, Abram Wood, and the one feminine disciple, Anna Page.[14] Mrs. Alcott was not a disciple, but served as faithful wife, and as ballast for her husband's balloon.[15]

Bronson Alcott was the head of the "New Eden" at Fruitlands. Alcott maintained that the evils of life were not so much social or political as personal, and that only personal reform could eradicate them. Trade was to be avoided at Fruitlands, and property was to be absorbed into the "New Spirit, which ever gives and never grasps."[16] Alcott asserted that outward abstinence was a sign of inward fullness. Animal food of all kinds was regarded as an abomination, and no animal substances, neither flesh, butter, cheese, eggs nor milk were allowed at Fruitlands. Neither were tea, coffee, molasses, nor rice permitted. Only water and native grains, fruits, herbs, and roots were consumed.[17]

Louisa reported that dress was prescribed as well

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[14]Sanborn and Harris, Bronson Alcott, II, 378-379; and Sears, Fruitlands, p. 12.

[15]Attributed by Louisa May Alcott to Abigail May Alcott, quoted in Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 100.

[16]Letter, Charles Lane and A. Bronson Alcott to A. Brooke, Sept. 8, 1843, in Sears, Fruitlands, pp. 45-46; and Sears, Fruitlands, p. 4.

[17]Letter, Charles Lane and A. Bronson Alcott to A. Brooke, Sept. 8, 1843, in Sears, Fruitlands, pp. 47, 49, 52.

as diet at Fruitlands. She said that:

> A new dress was invented, since cotton, silk, and wool were forbidden as the product of slave-labor, worm-slaughter, and sheep-robbery. Tunics and trousers of brown linen were the only wear. The women's skirts were longer, and their straw hat-brims wider than the men's, and this was the only difference. Some persecution lent a charm to the costume, and the long-haired, linen-clad reformers quite enjoyed the mild martyrdom they endured when they left home.[18]

Sears asserted that Lane designed the linen outfits worn by the Fruitlanders. She described them as consisting of loose trousers, tuniced coats and broad brimmed linen hats for the men, and linen bloomers for the Alcott girls, Anna, Beth, Louisa, and three-year-old baby Abba May, Mrs. Alcott, and Miss Page.[19]

Carter stated that one of the members of the community contended that clothes were an impediment to spiritual growth, and that the light of day was equally deadly. Accordingly, he secluded himself in his room in a natural state during the day, and only went out at night for exercise, when he wore a single white cotton garment that reached from his neck to his knees.[20] Louisa reported that going without clothes was contemplated by a bland bearded Englishman, but that he did not adopt the primitive costume,

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[18]Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 101.

[19]Sears, Fruitlands, p. 68.

[20]Robert Carter, "The Newness," quoted in Sears, Fruitlands, pp. 39-40.

and contented himself with meditatively chewing dry beans out of a basket.[21]

The daily routine of the Consociate Family at Fruitlands was also delineated. The Fruitlanders rose with the early dawn, began the day with cold bathing, succeeded by a music lesson, and then a chaste repast of fruit and bread. Each one found an occupation until noon at which time there was food for the mind in the form of "deep-searching conversation" as well as food for the body. After lunch labor again engaged the community members until the last meal of the day when they assembled in social communion until sunset when they retired, excepting Mrs. Alcott who stayed up later and mended by lamp light.[22]

Louisa and her sister Anna were included in the deep-searching conversations held at Fruitlands. On one occasion Charles Lane asked the girls, "What is Man?" Their answers were: "A human being; an animal with a mind; a creature; a body; a soul and a mind."[23] On another occasion Bronson Alcott asked his daughters, "What was God's

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[21]Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 97.

[22]Letter, Charles Lane and A. Bronson Alcott to A. Brooke, Sept. 8, 1843, in Sears, Fruitlands, p. 50; and Sears, Fruitlands, p. 122.

[23]Louisa May Alcott, Early Diary Kept at Fruitlands, 1843, Nov. 2, 1843, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 37. (Hereinafter referred to as Early Diary.)

noblest work?" Anna replied, "men;" while Louisa answered, "babies. Men are often bad; babies never are."[24]

While at Fruitlands, Louisa came under the tutelage of Charles Lane, whom Cheney referred to as an "accomplished scholar." Louisa recorded three samples of the lessons she had with Lane, and his use of the Socratic method. In the first dialogue Mr. Lane asked Louisa what virtues she wished more of. Louisa replied: "Patience, Obedience, Industry, Love, Generosity, Respect, Silence, Perseverance, and Self-denial." Then, Mr. Lane asked Louisa what vices she wished less of. She answered: "Idleness, Activity, Vanity, Pride, and Love of cats."[25] In the second example Louisa gave she identified Mr. Lane as having played the part of Socrates, while she played that of Alcibiades. That dialogue went as follows:

Mr. L.	L.
Socrates.	Alcibiades.
How can you get what you need?	By trying.
How do you try?	By resolution and perseverance.
How gain love?	By gentleness.
What is gentleness?	Kindness, patience, and care for other people's feelings.
Who has it?	Father and Anna.
Who means to have it?	Louisa, if she can.

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[24]Alcott, Early Diary, Sept. 1, 1843, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 35-36.

[25]Alcott, A Sample of our Lessons, in Early Diary, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 42; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 33.

> Write a sentence about anything. 'I hope it will rain; the garden needs it.'
> What are the elements of hope? Expectation, desire, faith.
> What are the elements in wish? Desire.
> What is the difference between faith and hope? 'Faith can believe without seeing; hope is not sure, but tries to have faith when it desires.'[26]

Louisa's third lesson had the same cast as the previous two and went thusly:

> What are the most valuable kinds of self-denial? Appetite, temper.
> How is self-denial of temper known? If I control my temper, I am respectful and gentle, and every one sees it.
> What is the result of this self-denial? Every one loves me, and I am happy.
> Why use self-denial? For the good of myself and others.
> How shall we learn this self-denial? By resolving, and then trying hard.
> What then do you mean to do? To resolve and try.[27]

This ended Louisa's record of the lessons she had with Lane, which coincided in Socratic method and moral and ethical content with those she had with her father.

Louisa stated that each adult member took a turn at teaching the children at Fruitlands, and, as each taught in his own way, the result was a chronic state of chaos in their little child's minds. Anna Page was set to instructing the children in the common branches as well as in music. Lane taught arithmetic, music, and composition as well as philosophical speculation. Cheney asserted

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[26] Ibid., p. 43.

[27] Ibid.

that Lane was not liked by the children, while Louisa stated that she hated Miss Page because she was so fussy. Anthony opined that Lane taught Louisa to write Socratic dialogue with ease, but that his work on her arithmetic and music was wasted.[28]

The Fruitlands experiment in Consociate Family Living ended in failure on account of disharmony among the members and financial problems in mid winter of 1844. The Alcott family moved into a neighbor's farmhouse for the balance of the winter, and then moved to the village of Still River in the spring. While living in Still River Louisa attended a little district school taught by Miss Maria Louisa Chase. There Louisa learned reading, writing, and games. In November 1844 the Alcott family left Still River for Concord where they again lived with the Hosmer family. Louisa's father taught the Hosmer children and his own.[29]

Bronson Alcott supervised his children's diary-writing, reading, spelling, conversation, grammar, and arithmetic, while Mrs. Alcott taught them every sort of

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[28] Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 101; and Alcott, Early Diary, Thursday 14, 1843, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 36; and Anthony, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 63-64; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 33.

[29] Sears, Fruitlands, p. 131; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 140; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 40-41, 45.

housework. Needle-work began early and by the time Louisa was twelve she was employed by the children in the neighborhood as a doll's dressmaker.[30] Louisa said that her wise mother was anxious to give her a strong body to support a lively brain, and turned her loose in the country to run wild,

> . . . and learn of Nature what no books can teach and to be led,--as those who truly love her seldom fail to be,--'Through Nature up to Nature's God.'[31]

Louisa said that she found God in nature and got religion one morning at dawn while resting in the silent woods after running over the hills. Louisa stated that she saw the sun rise over hill and wide green meadows through an arch of trees as she had never seen it before. Louisa described her exhilarating experience as follows:

> Something born of the lovely hour, a happy mood, and the unfolding aspirations of a child's soul seemed to bring me very near to God; and in the hush of that morning hour I always felt that I 'got religion' as the phrase goes. A new and vital sense of His presence, tender and sustaining as a father's arms, came to me then, never to change through forty years of life's vicissitudes, but to grow stronger for the sharp discipline of poverty and pain, sorrow and success.[32]

Louisa and Emerson both agreed that an immanent God was to be

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[30] Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 30; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 27.

[31] Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 30.

[32] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

found in Nature, but their experiences of the Supreme Being differed markedly. Louisa felt a personal father-figure-God, while Emerson sensed an impersonal Over-Soul-God.[33]

In January 1845 the Alcotts bought the house known as the Cogswell Place or "Hillside." They moved into Hillside in the spring of 1846. Late in that spring Bronson Alcott tried to establish a small school in the village of Concord and engaged the services of Miss Sophia Foord as teacher. The plan failed, but Miss Foord stayed on and taught the Alcott children. During the early summer months Louisa went on field trips into the woods with Miss Foord and received botanical information from her there. In about mid summer Mr. Lane again took residence with the Alcott family. Lane instituted a rigid "Days Order of Indoor Duties for Children," and supervised the schoolroom, while Miss Foord was in charge of recreation and chores. At the end of October Lane left the Alcott home. In the winter Louisa attended a small district school taught by Mr. John Hosmer where she learned physiology and English grammar. Somewhere along the line Louisa also received instruction in geography and history, which she enjoyed. She never considered herself a student, but a great

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[33]Gabriel, "Emerson and Thoreau," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 59.

reader.[34]

While the Alcott family lived at Hillside they visited Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond. Thoreau took Louisa and her sisters out in his boat to see the pond and entertained them by playing his flute and telling them Indian stores.[35] Louisa regarded Thoreau highly and commemorated him in the following poem entitled,

Thoreau's Flute

We sighing said, 'Our Pan is dead;
  His pipe hangs mute beside the river
  Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music's airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
  The bluebird chants a requiem;
  The willow-blossom waits for him;--
The Genius of the wood is lost.'

Then from the flute, untouched by hands
  There came a low, harmonious breath;
  'For such as he there is no death;--
His life the eternal life commands;
Above man's aims his nature rose.
  The wisdom of a just content
  Made one small spot a continent,
And turned to poetry life's prose.

'Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild
  Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
  To him grew human or divine,--
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,
  And yearly on the coverlid
  'Neath which her darling lieth hid
Will write his name in violets.

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[34]Alcott, Sketch of Childhood, by Herself, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 29; and Louisa May Alcott quoted in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 398; Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 140; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 46-50.

[35]Ibid., pp. 52-53.

'To him no vain regrets belong
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence, though unseen,--
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;
Seek not for him--he is with thee.'[36]

In September 1847 Thoreau moved from Walden Pond into Emerson's house. Emerson left for Europe and Thoreau and Bronson Alcott built a summerhouse for him during his absence.[37]

Work and Reform

In the summer of 1848, when Louisa was fifteen years old, she began her teaching career in Emerson's barn. She taught the Emerson children and wrote fairy stories for his daughter, Ellen. She browsed through Emerson's library and found Goethe's Correspondence with a Child, which was purported to be a collection of the sentimental letters exchanged between Bettina von Arnim-Brentano and Goethe. The "child" was twenty-two years old when she met her fifty-seven year old idol. Louisa fashioned herself as Bettina and made Emerson her Goethe. She wrote letters to Emerson, but never sent them. She sat in a tall cherry-tree at midnight, singing to the moon until the owls scared her to bed. She left wild

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[36]Louisa May Alcott, "Thoreau's Flute," quoted in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 136.

[37]Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 53.

Figure 2. Louisa May Alcott from Louisa May Alcott, by Madeleine B. Stern (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950); and May Alcott's drawing of the Walden hut, with Thoreau in the boat below from A Thoreau Profile by Milton Meltzer and Walter Harding (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962), p. 146.

flowers on Emerson's doorstep and sang Mignon's song under his window in very bad German.[38]

Louisa said that Emerson was an inspiration to her and asserted that through reading his essays on Self-Reliance, Character, Compensation, Love, and Friendship she came to understand herself and life, and God and Nature. Emerson's works were included in her library along with those of Shakespeare, Carlyle, Margaret Fuller, and George Sand. Her reading list of favorites included Dickens, Plutarch, John Milton, Schiller, Madame de Staël, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, among others. Louisa read Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, and noted that she liked Whittier, Herbert, Crashaw, Keats, Coleridge, Dante and a few other poets. She did not care for George Eliot or any of the poets considered modern in her time.[39]

In November 1848 the Alcott family left Concord for Boston. They rented a house on Dedham Street and Mr. Alcott held conversations while Mrs. Alcott did social work with the poor of Boston for thirty dollars a month. Abigail Alcott collected bundles of clothing and

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[38]Louisa May Alcott, "manuscript prepared for a friend," in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 57; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 57.

[39]Alcott, Journal, 1853, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 68; and Alcott, Journal, April 27, 1882, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 345; Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Mrs. Dodge, April 13, 1886, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 377; and Louisa May Alcott quoted in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 398.

parcels of medicines in a Relief Room she had on Washington Street. This room was later relocated on Groton Street. Louisa saw Boston's poverty-stricken women come to her mother to find employment or shoes, bonnets or shawls, needles or omnibus tickets. The Alcott home became a shelter for lost girls, abused wives, friendless children, and weak and wicked men. It was also a shelter for fugitive slaves. One of them was hidden in an unused brick oven by Mrs. Alcott. Louisa's mother and father had no money but they gave time, sympathy, and help to those less fortunate than themselves. Three evenings a week Mrs. Alcott and her daughters, Anna and Louisa, went to teach a class of adult Negroes to read and write and make out their washing bill.[40]

The Alcott family moved in and around Boston during the years from 1848 to 1857. While Louisa was in Boston she taught in the Warren Street Chapel Charity School, in private homes, in the parlor of the Alcott home, and assisted her sister Anna in her school on Canton Street. Louisa also worked as a seamstress and as a domestic servant. In her spare time she wrote stories. She also attended Theodore Parker's Sunday evening receptions where she met

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[40]Alcott, Journal, 1852, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 67-68; and Salyer, Marmee, pp. 132-146; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 59-61.

William Lloyd Garrison.[41]

Louisa was very interested in the Anti-Slavery movement as were her parents and her uncle, Samuel May, who had been closely associated with Garrison. Her uncle had served briefly as general agent and secretary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and had turned his house into a station on the Underground Railway. Bronson Alcott was an early advocate of abolition and served on the Boston Vigilance Committee after the arrest, trial, and return of the fugitive slave Thomas Sims in 1851. The Committee was striving to save Negro refugees from the clutch of the Fugitive Slave Law. In the 1850's in and out of Boston Louisa attended innumerable Anti-Slavery meetings where she heard Wendell Phillips, Channing, and other Abolitionists speak.[42]

In 1857 the Alcott family again left Boston for Concord. There they bought the Orchard House which was to be their home for the next twenty-five years. Louisa returned to Boston and took a position as a little girl's governess. She finished her employment and returned to

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[41]Alcott, Journal, Nov. 1856, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 85; and Alcott, Journal, Nov. 6, 1856, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 87; and Alcott, Journal, Dec. 1856, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 88; and Alcott, Journal, Dec. 18, 1856, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 88; and Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Amos Bronson Alcott, Nov. 29, 1856, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 90; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 62, 64-66.

[42]Jones in Alcott, Hospital Sketches, p. xiii; and Shepard, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, p. 234.

Concord at Christmas. She was in Concord when Captain John Brown spoke on Kansas affairs as Frank Sanborn's guest at the Concord Town Hall, but did not attend the meeting. However, on December 2, 1859, the day that John Brown was executed, Louisa did attend a memorial meeting in Concord's Town Hall where Emerson, Thoreau, her father, and others spoke. Thoreau began the program by reading appropriate poets and concluded with his own rendition of Tacitus. Emerson read from Brown's own words and Bronson Alcott ranged from Plato to Jesus.[43] Louisa contributed a poem, "With a Rose that Bloomed on the Day of John Brown's Martyrdom," in which she wrote:

> And the gallows only proved to him
> A stepping-stone to heaven.[44]

The poem was published in Garrison's Liberator and was reprinted in 1860 in an anthology of testimonials to the martyred Brown, Echoes of Harper's Ferry by James Redpath. In May of 1860 Mr. and Mrs. Alcott held a reception at which the widowed Mrs. Captain Brown, Mrs. Brown Jr., and Frederick Watson Brown, John Brown's baby grandson, were guests of honor. F. B. Sanborn later brought two of Brown's

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[43]Jones in Alcott, Hospital Sketches, p. xiii; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 90, 92-93.

[44]Quoted by Jones in Alcott, Hospital Sketches, p. xiii.

daughters to board at the Alcott house.[45]

In January 1862, at the suggestion of Elizabeth P. Peabody, Louisa accepted James T. Fields' offer of forty dollars and his patronage and set up a kindergarten in Boston in a room in the Warren Street Chapel with twelve pupils and an assistant, whom Louisa did not want. During the month of April, Louisa commuted forty miles from Boston to Concord to be with her family in the evenings and on weekends. She did not like teaching and was relieved by her sister Abba May for a month. She went home to Concord to housekeeping and writing. She felt that her labors as a teacher had ended in a wasted winter and a debt of $40--to be paid, if she had to, by selling her hair. She was advised by Mr. Fields to stick to teaching because he thought that she could not write. Louisa ended her school teaching career in May 1862, and paid her debt to her assistant by giving her all the school furniture.[46]

In December 1862 Louisa reported to the Union

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[45]Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Mrs. Pratt, Sunday Morn, 1860, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 133; and Jones in Alcott, Hospital Sketches, p. xiv.

[46]Alcott, Journal, Feb. 1862, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 130; and Alcott, Journal, April, 1862, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 130; and Alcott, Journal, May 1862, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 131; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 129.

Hospital in Georgetown as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War. After about a month she fell with typhoid fever and was brought home to Concord by her father to recover. Louisa said that she was "never ill before this time, and never well afterward." Before she fell ill Louisa wrote letters home to Concord describing life and conditions at the Union Hospital. These letters were published under the title, "Hospital Sketches," in The Commonwealth, an anti-slavery magazine. The "Sketches" met with instant success and were copied in papers all over the North. They were published in 1863 in book form by her old abolitionist associate James Redpath. "Hospital Sketches" created an interest in the author. Louisa followed the "Sketches" with "M. L.," the story of a mulatto whose hand was branded by the initials "M. L.," and who was loved by a white woman. The Atlantic Monthly rejected the story because it was too sensational a theme and too pointed in doctrine. However, it was published in 1863 in The Commonwealth.[47]

In 1865 Louisa made her first trip to Europe as the companion of an invalid. Louisa grubbed away at French with no "master" and small success. She took

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[47]Louisa May Alcott quoted in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 137; and Jones in Alcott, Hospital Sketches, pp. xxxviii, xl-xlii; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 95, 126, 130.

lessons and met Ladislaws Wisneiwski, a charming Polish lad, with whom she exchanged English for French. She returned home and was asked by her publisher to write a story for girls. The request was repeated in May 1868, and Louisa began writing Little Women, based on her own family life at the Hillside house in Concord. Part I was finished in July and published on October 3, 1868. The book was immediately popular. A contemporary review in The Nation stated that Little Women was "an agreeable little story," which could be read by adults as well as children. In 1869 Part II was published simultaneously in a volume to match Part I. This combined edition was also reviewed by The Nation and received much the same approbation as did Part I, while Harper's New Monthly Magazine judged it a "rather mature book" for girls, but a "capital one for their elders." Little Women was translated into several languages and had a phenomenal sale. From this time on Louisa was able to make her family financially independent.[48] McCuskey asserted that Louisa's success as a writer brought recognition to her father as an

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[48] Alcott, Journal, Aug. 1865, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 175; and Alcott, Journal, Nov. 1865, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 178-179; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 115, 171-172, 189, 191; and The Nation, quoted in Judith C. Ullom, comp., Louisa May Alcott: A Centennial for Little Women; An Annotated, Selected Bibliography (Washington: Library of Congress, 1969), pp. 15-16, 18; and Harper's New Monthly Magazine, quoted in Ullom, Louisa May Alcott: A Centennial for Little Women; An Annotated, Selected Bibliography, p. 19.

educator, and a third edition of his Record of A School, retitled, Record of Mr. Alcott's School was prepared for publication in 1871. McCuskey's assertion was implicitly verified by an entry in Louisa's Journal. The book was published in 1874 and was reviewed with affection and kindness.[49] In 1870 Louisa visited Europe again. By the time of this second trip she had a popular reputation which brought her recognition and welcome. While in Rome, Louisa began work on Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys. Little Men was published in 1871. Jo's Boys and How They Turned Out. A Sequel to "Little Men" appeared in 1886[50] and completed Louisa's episodic, educational trilogy.

In October 1875 Louisa attended the Woman's Congress in Syracuse, New York. She was introduced to the Congress by Mrs. Livermore, and received an ovation as well as the honor of membership in the National Congress of the Women of the United States. Anthony asserted that Louisa's feminist ideals cropped up when she was seventeen or eighteen. In 1848, when Louisa was about sixteen or seventeen, the Seneca Falls Convention, which is considered the beginning of the suffragist movement in America, was

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[49]Alcott, Journal, Jan. 1875, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 275; and McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 157-158.

[50]Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 210; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 124, 359.

held. Woman's rights were actively discussed, petitions were drawn up, careers for "ladies" were much agitated, and reforms were put through. Anthony maintained that those activities resulted, among other things, in Louisa's mother's employment as a social worker in Boston in 1849. Anthony alleged that Louisa's original interest in woman's rights was not political but economic, and a consequence of having taken part in the struggle to make a living for herself and her family.[51]

It is worth noting that Louisa's mother and father were interested in woman's rights. In 1867 Bronson Alcott signed "Lucy Stone's Appeal for Women's Right to Suffrage," and wrote to her and said:

> 'Gladly sign your appeal, assured that woman is soon to have her place in the State with every right of the citizen. What ideal republics have fabled, ours is to be. Nor need we fear the boldest experiment which the moral sense of the best women conceives and advocates.[52]

Shepard stated that Louisa's father was a gyneolater and that his worship of women was one of his most decided

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[51]Anthony, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 78, 262; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 276; and Caroline Bird with Sara Welles Briller, Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down, Pocket Books (Rev. ed.; New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1971), p. 23; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 244.

[52]Amos Bronson Alcott, Journal, Sept. 12, 1867, in Shepard, The Journals of Amos Bronson Alcott, p. 389.

traits.[53]

After Concord's Centennial Celebration in 1876 when all the women of the town (even the venerable old lady who had watched the battle in 1776 from the Old Manse) were barred from the speakers' platform, Louisa's mother wrote to the Judge of Probate asking for an abatement of the taxes for the year. Mrs. Alcott demanded that either taxation be suspended or the ballot box be made available to women voters. At a suffragist meeting held in Concord after the Centennial, Lucy Stone had declared that she would not pay one cent of tax to a government which would not permit women to share Centennial honors, although it would not spare them the expenses.[54] Evidently Louisa's mother agreed with Lucy Stone and took the aforesaid action.

Though Louisa may have started out by being more interested in woman's economic position than in her political one, she eventually did assert herself in that sphere. Louisa said that she objected to being ranked with idiots, felons, and minors and got up her own suffrage meeting in Concord by driving around and drumming it up. The meeting was met by an effort to destroy it by noise and riot. Louisa's efforts were not in vain though, for in 1880 she was the first woman in Concord to register as

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[53]Shepard, The Journals of Amos Bronson Alcott, p. 127.

[54]Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 241-243.

a voter. She voted at town meetings in school committee elections, and was critical of the turn out in 1883 calling it "a poor show for a town that prides itself on its culture and independence."[56]

Louisa was begged by Wendell Phillips, who championed the Woman's Movement as the greatest reform in history, to write a preface for Mrs. Harriet Robinson's Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A General, Political, Legal and Legislative History from 1774 to 1881. Louisa declined because she said that she did not write prefaces well.[57] She referred the book to her publisher, Mr. Niles, at Roberts Brothers and stated in her correspondence with him:

> I think that we shall be glad by and by of every little help we may have been able to give to this reform in its hard times, for those who take the tug now will deserve the praise when the work is done.
>
> I can remember when Antislavery was in just the same state that Suffrage is now, and take

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[56]Alcott, Journal, July 14, 1879, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 320; and Alcott, Journal, Sept. 1879, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 321; and Alcott, Journal, March 20, 1880, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 327; and Alcott, Journal, Sept. 1880, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 337; and Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Mr. Niles, Feb. 19, 1881, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 285; and Alcott, Journal, March 1881, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 342; and Alcott, Journal, April 2, 1883, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 353; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 275.

[57]Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Mr. Niles, Feb. 12, 1881, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 341; and Henry Steele Commager, "Theodore Parker," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 85.

> more pride in the very small help we Alcotts could give than in all the books I ever wrote or ever shall write.[58]

Louisa gave her money, time, and effort to the cause of feminism. She became one of the editors of a suffrage magazine and contributed "A Flower Fable" to the Woman Suffrage Bazaar Journal. The tale pictured a domain ruled by gentle Queen Violet, who closed the Grapevine Hotel and opened a hospital for the sick and homeless. Louisa was an ardent worker in behalf of women's rights and interests at a time when the movement was getting under way and she was in poor health. She advanced the old feminist emphasis on character development through responsibility and learning experience in her writings and may be described as a pioneer feminist; our contemporary revolutionary women's liberationist Shulamith Firestone labeled her a "goody-good" model.[59] An examination of Louisa's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys, which will be given in the following chapter, reveals her interests in women's rights to equal educational, occupational, and political opportunities as well as her educational ideas in general.

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[58] Letter, Louisa May Alcott to Mr. Niles, February 19, 1881, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 342.

[59] Anthony, Louisa May Alcott, p. 262; and Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex; The Case for Feminist Revolution, A Bantam Book (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 23-25; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 327.

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

* * *

As the earlier chapters have indicated, Louisa May Alcott's family was one that was keenly interested in educational theory and practice. Her father, Bronson Alcott, conducted a number of schools and was referred to as America's Pestalozzi on account of the similarity of his early thought and method to that of the renowned Swiss educator. In light of her family background, it is not surprising that educational ideas are existent in Louisa's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. The concepts were presented as an integral part of the story of a New England family's life, the real life prototype of which was Louisa's own family. Louisa's mother and father were fictionally portrayed as Mr. and Mrs. March, Louisa's alter ego was Jo, her sister Anna was depicted as Meg, her sister Elizabeth became Beth, and her sister Abba May was represented as Amy. The March family history continued in Little Men and Jo's Boys. Many of the characterizations found in the trilogy were composites of actual people, while others more closely corresponded to their real life counterparts. Many of the episodes which Louisa portrayed were based on incidents in the

Alcott family life; and other situations were entirely fictional.[1]

It is also essential to note that Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys reflected the Alcott family's Puritan New England inheritance. Louisa peppered the books with puritanical preachments on virtue, studded them with moralistic slogans such as, "Honesty is the best policy," and adorned them with proverbs like, "Get the distaff ready, and the Lord will send the flax." She also made frequent references to characters and episodes from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a Puritan story written in 1660 when Bunyan was imprisoned in England's Bedford jail for religious nonconformity. Pilgrim's Progress, which was avidly read by Louisa's father during his boyhood, was immensely popular with Louisa and her sisters who read it, played its characters, and acted it out. Louisa adapted chapter titles and the

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[1]Alcott, Jo's Boys, "Preface;" and Louisa May Alcott, quoted in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 193.

following "Preface" to Little Women from Bunyan's book.[2]

> 'Go then, my little Book and show to all
> That entertain and bid thee welcome shall,
> What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast;
> And wish what thou dost show them may be blest
> To them for good, may make them choose to be
> Pilgrim's better, by far, than thee or me.
> Tell them of Mercy; she is one
> Who early hath her pilgrimage begun.
> Yea, let young damsels learn of her to prize
> The world which is to come, and so be wise;
> For little tripping maids may follow God
> Along the ways which saintly feet have trod.'[3]

Louisa's prefatory admonition will be acceded to in an examination of Little Women, which follows next in this chapter, and Little Men and Jo's Boys, which succeed it.

Little Women

Louisa set the time for Part I of Little Women at the American Civil War. In the opening scene the "unworldly" March family was minus its father who had gone off

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[2]Louisa May Alcott, Little Women, or Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, Collier Books (2 vols; 4th ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), chaps. i, vii, viii, xix, xxx. (Hereinafter referred to as Little Women.) And Louisa May Alcott, Little Men, Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys, Collier Books (2nd ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), chaps. iii, iv, vi, xv. (Hereinafter referred to as Little Men.) And Alcott, Jo's Boys, pp. 69, 104, 177, 186, 266; and John Bunyan, The Pilgirm's Progress From This World to That Which Is to Come: Delivered Under the Similitude of A Dream (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1875), pp. 115, 153, 172, 174, 203, 366, 402; and McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 11; and see David E. Smith, John Bunyan in America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) pp. 93-102 for an analysis of Bunyan in Little Women and "Transcendental Wild Oats;" and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 48.

[3]Alcott, Little Women, "Preface."

to serve as an army chaplain. The girls were in the care of "Marmee," their idealized mother, and a faithful old female servant. The adolescent March girls were characterized as: Jo, the tomboy; Meg, the pretty one; Beth, the shy one; and Amy, the artist--portrayals which closely corresponded to their real life counterparts. The cast of characters included Ted Laurence, the rich boy next door who was a composite of Ladislaws Wisneiwski, the Polish lad whom Louisa met while in Europe, and Alf Whitman; Mr. Laurence, Ted's grandfather; John Brooke, Ted's poor English tutor; the March girls' old aristocratic Aunt March; Amy's strict schoolmaster, and several other minor characters.[4]

Part I of Little Women dealt primarily with Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy's informal education at home by Marmee. Marmee gave each of the girls little Bibles which they read together. They sang hymns and practiced personal acts of charity, such as giving away their Christmas breakfasts to a family less fortunate than themselves. Marmee instructed them to go directly to their "Heavenly Father," in times of trouble and temptation.[5] She said,

> The more you love and trust Him, the nearer you will feel to Him, and the less you will depend on human power and wisdom. His love and care

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[4]Ibid., chaps. i, ii, iv, vii; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, p. 175.

[5]Alcott, Little Women, chaps. ii, xi, xv.

> never tire or change, can never be taken from you, but may become the source of lifelong peace, happiness, and strength. Believe this heartily, and go to God with all your little cares, and hopes, and sins, and sorrows, as freely and confidingly as you come to your mother.[6]

The sentiments expressed here are repeated like a constant refrain in Louisa's melodramatic juvenile romance.

From an early age Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy cultivated energy, industry, and independence. The girls were encouraged to take care of themselves and keep busy for, "Satan finds plenty of mischief for the idle hands to do." Marmee used the "play system" to teach them the necessity of each doing their duty and living a little for others. She put the girls on their own for a day to cook and clean and take the consequences. Unfortunately, they did not fare too well and their pet bird died for neglect of feeding.[7] Marmee reviewed their failure of the practical test of character with the girls and lectured them as follows:

> . . . it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear and forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to . . . all . . .[8]

She extolled the virtue of work and preached that:

> Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone; it keeps us from ennui and mischief, is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense

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[6] Ibid., chap. xv.

[7] Ibid., chap. xi.

[8] Ibid.

> of power and independence better than money or fashion.9

Marmee advised moderation and said:

> Have regular hours for work and play, make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age will bring few regrets, and life become a beautiful success, in spite of poverty.10

In another episode, when Marmee left them to nurse the ailing chaplain March, the girls proved that they had learned their lesson in duty and cooperation; they passed their second test of character with flying colors.[11]

Old Aunt March also did some teaching in Little Women. The old aristocrat took Amy in hand and taught her as she herself had been taught sixty years previously. She used methods which carried dismay to Amy's soul, and which "make her feel like a fly in the web of a very strict spider." Amy had her lessons and was allowed one hour a day for exercise. After dinner she read aloud to the old woman and sewed and did patchwork. Aunt March was portrayed as an archetypal materialist who bribed Amy with a turquoise ring and advised Meg to marry for money. Marmee advised the opposite and asserted that whether married or single Jo, Meg, Bth, and Amy were the pride of

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., chaps. xv, xvi, xvii, xviii.

her's and their father's lives. Spinsterhood was nothing to be feared for independent girls were praised and declared respected and admired. This marks the beginning point in Louisa's trilogy of her recommendation for useful and happy spinsterhood--a concept which was diametrically opposed to that held by Rousseau in Emile. According to Rousseau, the ideal way of educating girls was in relation to men: they were to be prepared for duty as wives and mothers, not to be independent spinsters.[12] Louisa's idea of professional education for girls and its relevance to Louisa's historical milieu and our contemporary times will be dealt with further in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Louisa sketched the characteristic formal school situation of her day in Little Women. Bashful Beth and tomboy Jo did not go to school, while Meg was old enough to work as a nursery governess, and Amy attended what appeared to have been a town or district school. It was after a humiliating episode at that school that Amy came under the tutelage of Aunt March. Amy's severe schoolmaster caught her with forbidden fruit--"pickled limes"--in her desk. For this infraction of school rules she was

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[12] Ibid., chaps. ix, xix; and see Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emile (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), Book V.

struck on the palm of the hand with a stick and made to stand on the recitation platform before class until recess. This was the first time at all in Amy's life that force had been used on her and she was publicly humiliated. She reported the incident at home at lunch time and got much sympathy from her sisters and a little from Marmee, who allowed that Amy deserved some kind of punishment for breaking school rules, but not the corporal type. Marmee did not approve of Amy's schoolmaster's teaching method either, probably a rigid authoritarian one which consisted of rote memorization and cramming in of information, and Amy was immediately withdrawn from school. Amy was not allowed to feel entirely triumphant, however, for Marmee proceeded to lecture her on modesty. It seems that Amy had exhibited some conceit around home before her classroom escapade which Marmee did not like. Marmee lectured Amy and said that, "conceit spoils the finest genius."[13] She went on to say:

> There is not much danger that real talent or goodness will be overlooked long; even if it is, the consciousness of possessing and using it well should satisfy one, and the great charm of all power is modesty.[14]

This moralistic episode serves as another sample of the many vignettes which Louisa designed to provide literary moral pap for the young.

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[13] Ibid., chap. vii.

[14] Ibid.

Amy being punished by her schoolmaster

Figure 3. Ink drawing by Elinore Blaisdale in Louisa May Alcott: A Centennial for Little Women; An Annotated, Selected Bibliography, comp. by Judith C. Ullom (Washington: Library of Congress, 1969), p. 21.

Louisa asserted that it was possible to teach patience by example; and modesty and simplicity, love and duty, self-denial and self-control through experience. For example, Louisa stated that Jo learned to control her temper on account of a mishap which befell her youngest sister Amy. Because Jo was angry with Amy she neglected to keep as close a watch on her as she should have; and, while Jo and Ted Laurence skated on the pond, Amy fell through the ice. She was fished out by Jo and Ted and taken home to bed. Jo was portrayed as contrite with shame and guilt. Louisa stated that Jo learned the "bitterness of remorse and despair," and the "sweetness of self-denial and self-control" from the accident. The situation portrayed illustrates Louisa's characteristic simplistic and optimistic representation of what were considered real life learning experiences. Each vignette that Louisa presented had a happy ending--even death was not a tragedy, but merely a "great change."[15]

This exposition of Part I of Little Women would not be complete without mention of the simple pleasures and wholesome pastimes that Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy enjoyed. The girls put their imaginations to work and dramatized Pilgrim's Progress, wrote poems and plays, and made their

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[15] Ibid., chaps. viii, ix, xi; and Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. vii.

own stage props for their home productions. They sewed doll clothes, played with their cats, and read. Jo wrote stories in the garret and music loving Beth played the piano. The girls worked in the garden where each sister had a section to do what she liked with. They rowed on the river and took excursions in the woods where artist Amy drew from nature; Amy also designed fairies and illustrated stories. They collected pine cones and made things of them, and fashioned decorative wreaths. The girls socialized with Ted Laurence and visited old Aunt March. During inclement weather they amused themselves with a secret society which they had formed. They admired Dickens and called themselves the "Pickwick Club," and got up a weekly newspaper called, The Pickwick Portfolio. They also set up a little home post office and wrote to each other and to Ted Laurence.[16]

The homely amusements which the March girls enjoyed bear marked resemblance to the experiences which the early twentieth century progressive educators emphasized to stimulate the creative impulse in the child and bring it to concrete expression. The progressives stressed wholesome and creative activities such as nature study, gardening, music, dramatics, both the writing and production of plays,

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[16]Alcott, Little Women, chaps. iv, vi, ix, xii, xiii, xiv, xvii.

story-writing, art, handwork, and crafts.[17]

Part I of Little Women ended with Marmee and chaplain March's homecoming, and Meg's acceptance of poor tutor John Brooke's marriage proposal against materialistic Aunt March's advice. Part II was set three years after the Civil War was over. Father March was well and back at work with his books and his small parish. Meg married John Brooke and had twins: Demi and Daisy, and a girl named Josy. Ted Laurence went away to college, was graduated with honor, and returned home and proposed marriage to Jo, who refused him. Amy took art lessons and traveled at Aunt March's expense in Europe for several years as companion to her cousin Flo, who was chaperoned by her mother. Ted Laurence went to Europe; he found Amy; they became engaged, and married in Europe. They later had a daughter named Bess. Jo wrote stories and left home to live in Mrs. Kirke's boarding house in New York next door to the nursery in which she was to teach and sew. Jo met Professor Bhaer, a benevolent, poor language master, who taught German in the parlor of the boarding house. Jo became one of his German pupils and a friend. Professor Bhaer was luaded for his patience and method of tucking grammar "into the tales and poetry

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[17]Adolph E. Meyer, The Development of Education in the Twentieth Century (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939), pp. 19-63.

as one gives pills in jelly."[18]

Jo and Professor Bhaer attended a literary society meeting where they became involved in "philosophic pyrotechnics," Hegel and Kant, and the Subjective and Objective. The meeting left Jo feeling like she was "being turned adrift into time and space, like a young balloon out on a holiday." Neither she nor the Professor were happy with "Speculative Philosophy," which annihilated all the old beliefs. They felt that "God was not a blind force, and immortality was not a pretty fable, but a blessed fact." The wise gentleman outtalked Professor Bhaer, but they did not convince him.[19]

Louisa's simple and practical religious faith was most vividly portrayed in the chapters which dealt with Beth's illness and death.[20] Louisa said:

> Simple, sincere people seldom speak much of their piety; it shows itself in acts rather than in words, and has more influence than homilies or protestations. Beth could not reason upon or explain the faith that gave her courage and patience to give up life, and cheerfully wait for death. Like a confiding child, she asked no questions, but left everything to God and nature, Father and mother of us all, feeling sure that they, and they only, could teach and strengthen heart and spirit for this life and the life to come.

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[18] Alcott, Little Women, chaps. xviii, xxii, xxiv-xxv, xxx, xxxiii, et passim.

[19] Ibid., chap. xxxiv.

[20] Ibid., chaps. xviii, xix, xxxvi.

> She did not rebuke Jo with saintly speeches, only loved her better for her passionate affection, and clung more closely to the dear human love, from which our Father never means us to be weaned, but through which He draws us closer to Himself. She could not say, 'I'm glad to go,' for life was very sweet to her; she could only sob out, 'I try to be willing,' while she held fast to Jo, as the first bitter wave of this great sorrow broke over them together.21

Beth piously submitted to her fate and kept busy doing as much for others as her enfeebled hand allowed. She died after never recovering from an illness contracted as a consequence of having done a good deed.[22]

Louisa portrayed Jo's nursery school teaching through the fictitious medium of "Jo's Journal," in which she stated:

> Had a lively time in my seminary this morning, for the children acted like Sancho, and at one time I really thought I should shake them all round. Some good angel inspired me to try gymnastics, and I kept it up till they were glad to sit down and keep still.23

Jo's father also used gymnastics in teaching; however, the same means were not employed to the same ends as in the example given. Grandfather March taught his grandson Demi the alphabet by "forming the letters with his arms and legs, thus uniting gymnastics for head and heels." This was the method that Mr. March's real life counterpart,

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[21] Ibid., chap. xxxvi.

[22] Ibid., chap. xxxx.

[23] Ibid., chap. xxxiii.

Bronson Alcott, used with Louisa and her sisters.[24]

Louisa also portrayed Mr. March socratizing with Demi. That dialogue went as follows:

> 'What makes my legs go, Dranpa?' asked the young philosopher, surveying those active portions of his frame with a meditative air, while resting after a go-to-bed frolic one night.
>
> 'It's your little mind, Demi,' replied the sage, stroking the yellow head respectfully.
>
> 'What is a little mine?'
>
> 'It is something which makes your body move, as the spring made the wheels go in my watch when I showed it to you.'
>
> 'Open me. I want to see it go wound.'
>
> 'I can't do that any more than you could open the watch. God winds you up, and you go till He stops you.'
>
> 'Does I?' And Demi's brown eyes grew big and bright as he took in the new thought. 'Is I wounded up like the watch?'
>
> 'Yes, but I can't show you how, for it is done when we don't see.'
>
> Demi felt of his back, as if expecting to find it like that of the watch, and then gravely remarked, 'I dess Dod does it when I's asleep.'
>
> A careful explanation followed, to which he listened so attentively that his anxious grandmother said, 'My dear, do you think it wise to talk about such things to that baby? He's getting great bumps over his eyes, and learning to ask the most unanswerable questions.'
>
> 'If he is old enough to ask the question he is old enough to receive true answers. I am not putting the thoughts into his head, but helping him unfold those already there. These

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[24]Ibid., chap. xxxiv; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 21.

> children are wiser than we are, and I have no doubt the boy understands every word I have said to him. Now, Demi, tell me where you keep your mind?'
>
> If the boy had replied like Alcibiades, 'By the gods, Socrates, I cannot tell,' his grandfather would not have been surprised; but when, after standing a moment on one leg, like a meditative young stork, he answered, in a tone of calm conviction, 'In my little belly,' the old gentleman could only join in Grandma's laugh, and dismiss the class in metaphysics.[25]

Louisa's humorous fictional representation of Bronson Alcott's use of the method of Socratic dialogue is revelatory of his emphasis on intuitive development, phrased as the unfolding of thoughts already there.[26]

The finale to Little Women was the death of aristocratic Aunt March and Jo's inheritance of the old woman's estate named, "Plumfield." Plumfield was described as having consisted of an immense house, furnished with strong and plain furniture and room for dozens inside, splendid grounds, a garden, an orchard, a barn, and a shed. Jo planned to open a school at Plumfield for little boys--"a good, homelike school," with herself to take care of them, and Professor Bhaer to train and teach them in his own way, assisted by Mr. March, "who welcomed the thought of a chance for trying the Socratic method of education on

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[25] Ibid., chap. xxxxv.

[26] McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 86, 90.

modern youth." Jo planned to perhaps begin with rich pupils and then, when she had a start, take in a "ragamuffin or two."[27]

Jo's plans were fictitiously realized after her marriage to Professor Bhaer and their settlement at Plumfield. They started their school with a "family" of six or seven boys; and Ted Laurence's grandfather paid for the support of destitute boys he found for the place. The school was described as never a fashionable one, but just what Jo intended it to be--"a happy, homelike place for boys, who needed teaching, care, and kindness."[28] At Plumfield there were:

> . . . slow boys and bashful boys; feeble boys and riotous boys; boys that lisped and boys that stuttered; one or two lame ones; and a merry little quadroon, who could not be taken in elsewhere, but who was welcome to the "Bhaer-garten," though some people predicted that his admission would ruin the school.29

Paradoxically, the school was not ruined; and Jo added two boys of her own: Rob and Ted, so that every room in the house was full; every little plot in the garden had an owner; and the barn and shed were full of pet animals.[30]

There were a great many school holidays at

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[27]Alcott, Little Women, chap. xxxxvii.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid. The reader's attention is called to Louisa's use of 'Bhaer-garten' as a play on the word kindergarten.

[30]Ibid.

Plumfield, and the yearly apple-picking one, for which the Marches, Laurences, Brookes, and Bhaers turned out in full force, was the favorite of them all. The festival was informal and consisted of apple-picking, picnicking, cavorting, and singing. Louisa continued her portrayal of life and education at the fictional Plumfield boarding school in Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys.[31]

Little Men

In Little Men Plumfield became a coeducational institution populated by: Father Bhaer and Mother Bhaer, Jo and her husband; Franz, Professor Bhaer's sixteen year old nephew whom he was preparing for college, and who taught some and saw after the others; Emil, a sea-struck boy; Meg's children Demi, Daisy, and four year old Baby Josy; Jo's sons Rob and Baby Teddy; Dick Brown, an eight year old boy who had a crooked back; Adolphus Pettigill, also eight years old and a stutterer; Jack Ford, a money-lover; Ned Barker, a fourteen year old braggart; George Cole, an overfed twelve year old; six year old Billy Ward, who was mentally retarded as a result of having been overworked at absorbing "knowledge as a Strasburg goose does the food crammed down its throat;" Tommy Bangs, the school scapegrace; Nat Blake, the orphaned son of a destitute street musician who had been referred by Ted Laurence; fifteen

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[31] Ibid.

year old Dan, who sold newspapers and was recommended by Nat Blake; Annie Harding, called "Naughty Nan" by the boys; nurse Hummel; and Asia, the black cook. Jo's niece Bess was a visitor for a week,[32] and the "merry little quadroon" of Little Women was not mentioned at all.

Most of the children of Plumfield had been subjected to oppression, deprivation, suffering, and hardship of one kind or another. As victims of cultural, emotional, and physical handicaps they are like the children that Pestalozzi tried to educate at Stans; and like them they were to be rehabilitated in a home atmosphere of love and security. Compensatory education for disadvantagement at the farm school of Plumfield consisted of meeting the needs of the children on an individual basis. Plumfield was a home for the homeless as well as for those more fortunate than themselves. It was privately financed as was the special Pestalozzian school in the castle of Burgdorf, and had a similar economic mixture of paupers and bourgeoisie.[33]

Coeducation at Plumfield was based on the principle that having girls among the boys helped them learn gentle ways and improved their manners. Louisa fictitiously

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[32]Louisa May Alcott, Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys, Collier Books (2nd ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), chaps. i, ii, vi, xiii. (Hereinafter referred to as Little Men.)

[33]Gerald Gutek, Pestalozzi & Education (New York: Random House, Inc., 1968), pp. 39, 44.

credited Bess's "natural refinement" with a good "influence" on the careless lads around her. Since loud noises and quarreling frightened her, the boys toned themselves and each other down in deference to her. Even "restless, energetic, strong-minded" Nan was affected by the dainty "Princess" and tried to imitate her. Princess Bess's correspondent was domestic Daisy whose opposite was Naughty Nan.[34] Louisa contrasted Daisy and Nan as follows:

> Daisy knew nothing about woman's rights. She quietly took all she wanted, and no one denied her claim, because she did not undertake what she could not carry out, but unconsciously used the all-powerful right of her own influence to win from others any privilege for which she had proved her fitness. Nan attempted all sorts of things, undaunted by direful failures, and clamored fiercely to be allowed to do everything that the boys did. They laughed at her, hustled her out of the way, and protested against her meddling with their affairs. But she would not be quenched and she would be heard, for her will was strong, and she had the spirit of a rampant reformer.[35]

Mrs. Bhaer sympathized with Nan and tried to curb her frantic desire for complete liberty, showing her that she must wait, learn self-control, and be ready to use her freedom before she asked for it. Jo advised that Nan would become one of the sharp, strong, discontented women if she were rudely thwarted or ridiculed, and her energies were not channeled. She was given an herb garden and

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[34] Alcott, Little Men, chaps. vii, xiii, xxi.

[35] Ibid., chap. xv.

taught the various healing properties of the plants and let to try them out on the children in the little illnesses they had from time to time. The Bhaers were also to attempt to persuade Nan's father to let her study medicine as she would make a "capital doctor," for she had "courage, strong nerves, a tender heart, and intense love and pity for the weak and suffering."[36]

Plumfield was primarily a school for the cultivation of morals and manners, and was more like a great family than a school. Rules were few and banister sliding, pillow fights, and all manner of jovial games were allowed. A limited amount of classroom hijinks were tolerated, and a word from Professor Bhaer was enough to produce a lull when things went too far. The boys learned that liberty must not be abused, and they had a respectful relationship with Jo, who gave them five minutes to settle down before revoking privileges. Lie telling was not tolerated and was dealt with by reversing the order of things. Nat was the truth offender who was ordered to ferule dear old Professor Bhaer six strokes worth on the hand as punishment. He performed the dastardly deed with tear filled eyes, and broke down afterwards and swore to never tell lies again. Bronson Alcott was severely criticized for having used this

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[36] Ibid.

same disciplinary method at his ill-fated Temple School.[37]

Dan was the toughest discipline case that Plumfield had. He came with a half bold, half sullen look which made him look like a bad specimen. Dan sneered, was gruff in speech and manner, and took without thanks all that was given him. He was ignorant, but quick to learn what he chose, had sharp eyes, a saucy tongue, and a temper that was fierce and sullen by turns. Dan was silent and gruff with grown people and only now and then social among the boys. Few of them liked him; Professor Bhaer was apprehensive; and Jo insisted that there was something good in him for he was kind to animals and was a nature lover. Unfortunately, Dan proved himself by fighting. On account of this offense he was banished from Plumfield and sent to Mr. Page's place in the country with a chance of returning if he did well. He did not do well and ran off. Dan had some grim experiences and then came limping back to Plumfield. Jo took him in like a poor little black sheep come back to the fold. Her prescription for taming Dan was kindness, love, pity, and patience. This worked and Dan reformed himself.[38]

Gifts and praise were used as reinforcement for

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[37] Ibid., chaps. i, iii, iv, vii, x, xi; and McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, p. 85.

[38] Alcott, Little Men, chaps. vi, x.

good behavior and study habits at Plumfield. Arithmetic, history, geography, natural science, grammar, and composition were taught, and reading was encouraged. The children read Robinson Crusoe, Tales from the Arabian Nights, Edgeworth's Moral Tales and other unnamed children's classics. The emphasis in composition was not on correct punctuation and syntax, but on imagination and originality of expression. The children wrote letters from their personal experiences and composed poems and essays on topics taken from observation and study in nature. The art of public speaking was encouraged and compositions and verses were read aloud and criticized by the children as well as their teacher.[39]

Religion was a simple affair at Plumfield, and sin was defined as lying and stealing. The children attended services at a church of unspecified denomination, and took nature walks with Professor Bhaer afterwards. Father Bhaer taught them to "see and love the providence of God in the miracles which Nature worked before their eyes," and found 'Sermons in stones, books in running brooks, and good in everything.' Christ was venerated as "the Good Man," who blessed the children and was a faithful friend to the poor.[40]

Some of the imaginative children invented a

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[39] Ibid., chaps. ii, iv, vii, x, xvii.

[40] Ibid., chaps. iii, xv.

primitive religion which was based on an idea obtained from a story told them about the Pagan customs of the ancient Greeks. They christened their God "The Naughty Kitty-Mouse," and sacrificed their toys on an altar to it. Annabella, the kidskinned doll, was the last to go into the funeral pyre. She died by twisting and contorting in a fashion that terrified her infant destroyer, and sent Baby Teddy running to Jo to tell of the horrible sacrifice. The blind worshippers told their story while Jo laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. She advised them that if she had a Kitty-Mouse she would have a good one who liked safe pleasant ways of playing, not destructive and frightening ones.[41]

Louisa's Kitty-Mouse episode calls to mind William Golding's Lord of the Flies. Golding depicted the degeneration of a group of marooned boys who also invented a fearsome God; worse yet they hunted each other down to the death of two of them. The theme of Golding's story was an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral was that the shape of a society depends on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however logical or respectable it may appear to be. In this Golding was in agreement with the New England Transcendentalists. All of Golding's book was symbolical while the episode in

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[41] Ibid., chap. viii.

Louisa's Little Men was autobiographical;[42] it was also paradoxical and had implicit symbolic meaning. Whether she realized it or not, Louisa implied that people make their own Gods; an implication which contradicted her idea of a father-figure-God found in nature.

The "whole system of fashionable education" of the time was scorned at Plumfield, and it was asserted that self-knowledge, self-help, and self-control were more important than Latin, Greek, and mathematics. The purpose of education was preparation for honest and responsible living in a pluralistic world, and to that end, the mastery of social skills and self-development were given greater emphasis than the acquisition of knowledge. The teacher was to help the child's mind unfold like a flower, and act as a model worthy of emulation. The children were expected to imitate each other's virtues, learn self-denial from each other, and even teach the adults of Plumfield as much as they were taught by them. Cooperative effort, faith, loyalty, trust, friendship, honesty, and honor were virtues to be learned through experience and practice. Healthy bodies were to be cultivated by much exercise and work in the out-of-doors; and work was to be used as a channel for pent-up energies that would have been otherwise expended in less useful ways.

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[42] Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 25; and see William Golding, Lord of the Flies, Capricorn Books (29th ed.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959).

Plumfield had a boys band which gave concerts, and the children danced and did gymnastics to music. The program also included needlework for the girls.[43] Louisa presented the fictitious results of Plumfieldian education in Jo's Boys and How They Turned Out.

Jo's Boys

The time for Jo's Boys was set ten years later when the Plumfield boarding school was transformed into Laurence College, a coeducational liberal arts institution. The college was generously endowed by Ted Laurence's grandfather's legacy; and Ted built a house on the campus which served as his home and the student cultural center. Amy, Jo's sister and Ted's wife, presided in this lovely home called, "Mount Parnassus," and played "Lady Bountiful" to needy students. Ted was a generous patron of the arts and added a little theatre building and subsidized the study of music. Ted and Amy's daughter Bess shared their interest in the arts.[44]

Professor Bhaer was cast in the dual role of college president and member of a faculty composed of idealistic and optimistic men and women. Mr. March was the college's chaplain; Jo was the "confidante and defender" of the men and women; and Jo's sister Meg was girls' counselor. John Brooke had died and Meg lived on

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[43]Alcott, Little Men, chaps. i-ii, iv, x, xiii-xvi, xx-xxi.

[44]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. i.

campus. Most of the students were poor and came from out of state. They were of all creeds, colors, and ranks. Shabby youths came from up country; eager girls came from the West; awkward freedmen or women came from down South; and well-born poverty stricken youths also attended.[45]

Laurence College was the setting against which the continuing story of the original boys and girls of Plumfield was told. Franz, Professor Bhaer's nephew, was portrayed as working with a merchant kinsman in Hamburg and doing well. Before the story ended Franz was married to Ludmilla, a German girl. Sea-struck Emil was a second mate on the "Brenda," a merchant ship owned by his uncle, which was shipwrecked. Emil distinguished himself by responsible action, patience, and courage, and eventually married Mary, the English girl with whom he had been shipwrecked. Money-loving Jack was in business with his father and bent on getting rich. Jo's nieces Bess and Josy had careers in the arts and then married. Orphan Nat studied music at the Conservatory at Ted Laurence's expense, finished off in Germany and England, and came home and married Jo's niece Daisy. Jo's nephew went to work for a book publisher, presumably married Alice Heath, a coed at Laurence College, and lived

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[45] Ibid., chaps. i, xvii; and Alcott, Little Men, chap. xix.

to see his name above the door of the firm. Jo's son Ted became an eloquent and famous clergyman, while her son Rob became a professor at Laurence College. Stuttering Adolphus, overfed George, and braggard Ned studied at Harvard. Adolphus became a society man of mark till he lost his money, when he found employment in a fashionable tailoring establishment. Ned studied law at Harvard and presumably became a lawyer. Overfed George became an alderman and died suddenly of apoplexy after a public dinner. Crooked backed Dick and mentally retarded Billy also died.[46]

Dan was a wanderer and after geological researches in South America he tried sheep farming in Australia, and was next in California looking up mines. Louisa said that Dan had a lawless nature born in him which could not be changed. She asserted that people cannot be molded like clay and each must be what God and nature make us. She maintained that we cannot change much, but we can be helped to develop the good and control the bad elements in us.[47] In characteristic fashion Louisa illustrated her assertions through moralistic episodes and fictional case histories.

Dan's mother was credited with his finer sentiments, while his father, who was imagined as a handsome, unprincipled,

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[46] Ibid., chaps. i-ii, x-xi, xv, xviii, xix, xxii.

[47] Ibid., chaps. i, iv, x, xxi.

and dangerous man, with more than one broken heart to answer for, was faulted for Dan's weakness. Louisa hinted that Dan might have had Indian blood in him because of his love of a wild, wandering life and his appearance. Dan's mother ran away from her cruel husband to save her son from bad influences; unfortunately, she died and Dan fell into bad company. When Dan came to Plumfield he found a home and true friends who admired him and loved him in spite of his faults. On Dan's return visit to Plumfield, ten years later, Jo gave Dan the Bible which her mother gave her and told him to read it, and not neglect religion.[48] She went on to say:

> . . . Nature is your God now; she has done much for you; let her do more, and lead you to know and love a wiser and more tender teacher, friend, and comforter than she can ever be. That is your only hope; don't throw it away, and waste time, for sooner or later you will feel the need of Him, and He will come to you and hold you up when all other help fails.[49]

Jo advised Dan to keep good company and keep clear of temptation. Unfortunately, Dan did not heed her advice and killed a man in self-defense in a gun fight in a gambling den. Dan served a prison term for his crime and after his release worked as an overseerer in a mine. Dan was hurt in a mining accident while saving some trapped miners, and was brought home to Plumfield by Jo's

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[48] Ibid., chap. vi.

[49] Ibid.

son Ted. Dan confessed his sin to Jo, who forgave him and recommended that he make atonement by doing missionary work among the Indians for whom he had great sympathy and pity. Ted Laurence went to Washington and made arrangements for Dan's mission, and Dan served the Montana Indians until he was shot dead while defending them.[50] Dan's history was the most thorough going of any of those given, and was the most revelatory of Louisa's concept of inherited tendencies and propensities.

Another vivid characterization which Louisa presented by way of asserting her decided opinion on useful and happy spinsterhood was that of Naughty Nan, who was described as the "pride of the community." At sixteen Nan was getting on bravely studying medicine, for, "thanks to other intelligent women, colleges and hospitals were open to her." Nan never wavered in her determination to be a doctor and refused all offers of marriage. Tommy Bangs studied medicine for Nan's sake as he hoped that this would make her reconsider his marriage proposal. Tom attempted to use a girl named Dora to make Nan jealous, but got involved instead and ended up by marrying her, dropping medicine, and going into business with his father.[51]

Nan held advanced views on all reforms, and was anxious about her rights, "having had to fight for some of

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[50] Ibid., chaps. xii, xx.

[51] Ibid., chaps. i, ix.

them."[52] She was interested in Woman's Suffrage and declared:

> . . . I went to a suffrage debate in the Legislature last winter, and of all the feeble, vulgar twaddle I ever heard, that was the worst, and those men were our representatives. I blushed for them, and their wives and mothers. I want an intelligent man to represent me, if I can't do it myself, not a fool.[53]

Nan had decided opinions on the relationship between the sexes as well and said,

> . . . My idea is that if we girls have any influence we should use it for the good of these boys, and not pamper them up, making slaves of ourselves and tyrants of them. Let them prove what they can do and be before they ask anything of us, and give us a chance to do the same. Then we know where we are, and shall not make mistakes to mourn over all our lives.[54]

Nan was joined on the stump by Alice Heath, who was a girl after Nan's own heart, and "had chosen a career, like a brave and sensible young woman." Alice said:

> . . . Only give us a chance, and have patience till we can do our best. Now we are expected to be as wise as men who have generations of all the help there is, and we scarcely anything. Let us have equal opportunities, and in a few generations we will see what the judgment is. I like justice, and we get very little of it.[55]

Contradictorily, Alice did not stick with her choice of career, but married Jo's nephew Demi. Nan, However,

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[52] Ibid., chap. iv.

[53] Ibid., chap. v.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

never relented and remained a "busy, cheerful, independent spinster," who dedicated her life to her "suffering sisters and their children, in which true woman's work she found abiding happiness."[56]

It was insisted that girls should learn to sew whether educated or married. Therefore, in addition to classes in Latin, Greek, the higher mathematics, and science of all sorts which prospered at Laurence College, the girls had sewing seminars. While they sewed Jo gave lectures on health, religion, and politics. She also gave copious extracts from Miss Frances Cobbe's Duties of Women, which discussed women's duties arising from their relationships with God, with men as wives, as mothers, daughters, sisters, members of society and citizens of the state, and members of the human race; Miss Anna Brackett's Education of American Girls, which set forth a program based on a high regard for woman's mental ability; Mrs. Eliza Duffey's No Sex in Education; or, An equal chance for both boys and girls, which contained the views of a number of thoughtful persons, chiefly women; upon the matters treated of in Dr. Edward H. Clarke's Sex in Education; or, a fair chance for girls, which denounced coeducation for health reasons; and Mrs. Abba Woolson's Dress Reform: A Series of Lectures Delivered in Boston, on Dress As It Affects the Health of Women in which a costume was proposed that would

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[56] Ibid., chap. xxii.

not sacrifice its femininity, but should be both more beautiful and more practical than the heavy, awkward, confining fashions of the day. Jo also read "many other excellent books wise women write for their sisters, now that they are waking up and asking, 'What shall we do?'"[57]

During one of the sewing seminars a brisk conversation arose concerning "superfluous women" and careers for spinsters. It was asserted that "old maids" were not sneered at as much as they used to be, since some of them had grown famous and proved that woman is not a half but a whole human being and can stand alone. Florence Nightingale and Miss Frances Cobbe, whose protest won the protection of English law for abused wives, were cited as cases in point. George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Browning, and Harriet Martineau, who among others stimulated a movement for physical training for girls in America, were also mentioned. Woman's ability to bear the strain of disciplined study was discussed, and it was asserted that it was all nonsense about girls not being able to study as well as boys. The old argument about the superiority of the male brain as compared to the female brain on account of its relatively larger size was refuted by the statement that, "Quality, not quantity, wins the day, you know."[58]

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[57] Ibid., chap. xvii.

[58] Ibid.

Louisa stumped for coeducation on the grounds that having females with males helped to upgrade the academic performance of the men and helped polish them. She stated that neither sex was to cram in knowledge, and both sexes were to engage in athletic sports, which were in high favor at Laurence College. It was school policy that care must be taken for bodies as well as for souls and minds. The male students row boated on the river and played baseball and football in the meadow, while the females played tennis and croquet. There was a gymnasium on campus which both sexes presumably used.[59]

Laurence College was regarded as a "busy little world," a "little republic," in which special care was taken to fit the students to play their parts worthily in the "great republic," which offered them opportunity and serious duty. Louisa asserted that the social influence was considered by some to have been the better part of the training they received, for "education is not confined to books, and the finest characters graduate from no college, but make experience their master and life their book." Other students cared only for the "mental culture and were in danger of over-studying," under the pervasive "delusion" that learning must be had at all costs, "forgetting that health and real wisdom are better." Another group hardly knew what they wanted, but were desirous of whatever could

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[59] Ibid., chaps. vxi, vxii.

fit them to face the world and earn a living.[60] Though these assertions were made specifically in reference to the girls of Laurence College, they may be taken as consistent generalizations which applied to the men as well.

Jo's Boys ended the story of the March family which began in Little Women, and came to include the boys and girls of Plumfield as elaborated upon in Little Men. Louisa concluded her trilogy by stating that all the marriages turned out well; the boys prospered in their various callings; and so did the girls. She said that she endeavored to suit everyone by many weddings, few deaths, and as much prosperity as the "eternal fitness of things" would permit. Louisa's closing melodramatic line was, "let the music stop, the lights die out, and the curtain fall forever on the March family."[61]

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[60] Ibid., chaps. i, xvii.

[61] Ibid., chap. xxii.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELEVANCE

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Louisa May Alcott's writings have been immensely popular since their publication in the nineteenth century, especially Little Women which has been reprinted, translated, and filmed. This chapter will examine the continued popularity of Louisa's Jo's Boys, Little Men, and Little Women and hypothesize the reasons for this popularity in an age when the Victorian life style seems to be irrelevant. Special attention will be given to the educational ideas contained in the books.

Personal and Social

Louisa May Alcott lived in the early Victorian nineteenth century when a prim ritual of manners and an exaggerated reticence in the matter of all private affairs prevailed. It took courage to write candidly of the inner workings of one's own family in that age. By honestly telling of her family life through the story of the Marches, Louisa shared with her readers the small quarrels, the impetuous mistakes, and the rebellion against duties which make up many people's early life experiences. In Louisa's centennary year, Lucille Gulliver suggested

that it was probably this universally appealing family life which made Little Women so popular for so long. Through the years foreign editions were made in Czechoslovakia, England, Scotland, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. Translations were done in Arabic, Bengali, Indonesian, Gaelic, Russian, Urdu, and Turkish; editions were also prepared for the blind.[1] The most recent edition was published in paperback in 1970.

In 1933 a film version of Little Women was released by RKO-Radio. In a review in The Nation William Troy stated that it was Louisa May Alcott's portrayal of the "transcendental virtues" which triumphed over the material emergencies of the Civil War that gave the story "relevance" to the hard times of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Louisa defined virtue as "honor, honesty, courage, and all that makes character." Troy asserted that everything that is meant by character is brought out by the pressure of war and depression. Louisa thought that virtue, manners, morals, and character could be taught. Richard D. Skinner, in The Commonweal, credited the story's appeal to the girls' lives which leapt over

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[1] Lucille Gulliver, comp., Louisa May Alcott: A Bibliography (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1932), pp. 3-4, 58-68; and Judith C. Ullom, comp., Louisa May Alcott: A Centennial for Little Women; An Annotated, Selected Bibliography (Washington: Library of Congress, 1969), pp. 27-31.

"all boundaries of poverty and circumstance." In 1949 a second film adaptation of Little Women was released by MGM. Good Housekeeping referred to the book as a "great American novel" and asserted that its appeal was perennial.[2]

Louisa May Alcott expressed a popular and practical moral philosophy that made classics of her writings. She embodied the perennial qualities and virtues of modesty, simplicity, honesty, resolution, perseverance, industry, duty, self-denial, friendship, love, charity, and good will in her story of the family life of the chaste March maidens. Louisa's depiction of these transcendental values satisfied a universal longing for goodness and happiness; through her art she bolstered a depressed morale and fictitiously realized peoples' hopes and ideals.

In The Gospel According to Peanuts, Robert Short stated that "real art" will always have something to say, and that it should be listened to carefully. Short alleged that the famous cartoon strip Peanuts, created by Charles M. Schulz, often assumes the form of a modern day, Christian parable, and he illustrated how closely the parables of Peanuts can parallel the parables of the New Testament in

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[2]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chaps. vi, xvi; and Alcott, Little Men, chaps. i, ii, xi; and William Troy, "Little Women," The Nation, November, 1933, pp. 630-31; and Richard D. Skinner, "Little Women," The Commonweal, December, 1933, pp. 217-18; and "Little Women," Good Housekeeping, May, 1949, p. 265.

the lesson suggested, in ways of suggesting these lessons, and in an indirect method which is both art and parable. Jerome S. Bruner, in The Relevance of Education, stated that in a work of art there is something that lies beyond the mere narrative, and pointed out that Pogo and Little Orphan Annie may be read as social criticism as well as in terms of "what-happened-that-day." Short maintained that art has a way of getting around one's intellectual and emotional prejudices and is one of the most eloquent and "influential" voices of any culture. He also noted that the artist is not above sugarcoating the most bitter pill or above cleverly disguising the truth. It is an interesting coincidence that Madeleine Stern stated that the morals in Louisa May Alcott's tales were sugarcoated. Short observed that art holds the mirror up to nature and reflects the hopes, fears, and needs of a culture. One may easily say that Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys did this.[3]

Louisa May Alcott's sugarcoated morality was unusual in an age when explicit and imperative "Thou shalt nots" prevailed. Threats of hell fire, eternal damnation, and a bogeyman God who was awful, fearsome, and vengeful

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[3]Jerome S. Bruner, The Relevance of Education (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), p. 88, 94; and Robert L. Short, The Gospel According to Peanuts, Bantam Books (7th ed.; Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), pp. 6-7, 9, 14, 18-19; and Stern, Louisa May Alcott, pp. 260, 324.

were typical devices used to frighten children into good behavior. Louisa was a literary nursemaid who sweetened morality with promises of rewards in this world and the next, and in a Mary Poppinsian fashion, administered her moral pap to the young with "a spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down in a most delightful way."[4]

There are certain conventions and sentiments reflected in Louisa May Alcott's writings which seem quaint and have passed out of fashion as have the hoop skirts, calling cards, and horse and buggies of that vanished age. Louisa used them, but she departed from the smug and stilted prose which was then thought to be the proper approach to young minds. The books of Louisa's time for young people seemed to make a point of introducing the topic of death. It seemed a matter of conscience with the writers of that day to remind their young readers that life was fleeting. One reason for this was that many people died before reaching their maturity. Louisa's treatment of the death of Beth, patterned after that of her own sister Elizabeth, differed markedly from that of other writers of that period. There was no false

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[4] Refrain from "A Spoonful of Sugar," a song in the film musical "Mary Poppins" produced by Walt Disney and released in 1963. Mary Poppins is a fictional English nursemaid who can slide up banisters and fly by means of an umbrella. Anne Carroll Moore quoted from The Horn Book on the dust jacket of Mary Poppins (see Pamela L. Travers, Mary Poppins New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962) stated that "Mary Poppins" will go marching on triumphantly--umbrella, carpet-bag and white gloves the signs of her earthly pilgrimage."

sentimentality or dramatized sorrow; instead, Louisa portrayed pain courageously faced with the spiritual comfort which comes with a sure trust in God and faith in immortality.[5]

Louisa May Alcott's writings mirrored nineteenth century educational ideas and practices as well as her personal convictions. Louisa's emphasis on morals and character reflected the objectives of most schools of the time. She accurately portrayed the typical New England district school in which children learned their three R's, reading, "riting," and "rithmetic." Rote memorization, harsh discipline, and corporal punishment were standard fare for both sexes. The prevalent lack of compulsory attendance laws in the decentralized schools of that era was depicted in Amy's withdrawal from school on account of Marmee's objections to the use of corporal punishment. Amy's subsequent education at home with old aunt March harked back to the times before the American Revolution in 1776 when girls were educated at home.[6]

During Colonial days girls were given elementary education at home and in dame schools with the little boys. While the dame school was open to girls, its most important

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[5]Gulliver, Louisa May Alcott: A Bibliography, pp. 4-6.

[6]Alcott, Little Women, chaps. iv, vii, xix; and Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education, pp. 13-14, 67-70; and Thomas Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States (2 vols.; New York: The Science Press, 1929), I, 362.

function was to give little boys the rudiments of English so that they could enter the town schools. The attitude of Puritan New England towards intellectual improvement on the part of women was decidedly unfavorable. Stiff-necked opponents ridiculed education for girls who were generally excluded from the town schools because their attendance was ruled improper. In this early period any education higher than that secured in the dame school came through individual effort, writing, and reading in private. It was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that girls were generally admitted to the town schools. The town schools were followed by the district schools and the common schools which were coeducational.[7]

The sons and daughters of Colonial New England's social, political, and religious elite had lessons with a private teacher or tutor. The boys went on to secondary education in the Latin Grammar School, but not the girls who had been treated as a parasitic class from early Colonial days. The prevailing conception of their intelligence, and the belief that women were destined for the home and marriage in effect stifled any ambition for higher education. The "learned wife" was not sought after.[8]

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[7]Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 128-129, 131-132, 137-138, 144, II, 225.

[8]Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education, p. 14; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 107, II, 400.

In about 1750 private venture schools appeared in the larger cities and private masters began to cater to the sons and daughters of the elite by offering some higher studies. It was at about this time that Rousseau argued for a strengthening of the chains of custom regarding women's limited home activities. In Emile Rousseau proposed that women be trained in the arts of housekeeping and home management and have little knowledge of society. Woody asserted that the private venture masters were among the harbingers of a more liberal concept of women's education in America.[9]

In the late eighteenth century the Latin Grammar Schools gave way to the academy or seminary which in many ways synthesized the functions of the Latin Grammar School and the private venture schools. At that time there were male academies or seminaries, female academies or seminaries, and male and female academies or seminaries. Generally, the female academies or seminaries and female departments of male and female academies or seminaries did not offer young women college preparatory courses but cultivated formal gentility and grace for their social value through a variety of accomplishments. Modern languages, particularly French, less often German or Italian, were considered

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[9]Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education, pp. 72-73; and Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emile (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1957), chap. v; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 301.

desirable adornment for the female mind. Elementary English studies, spelling, reading, and writing were constants. The early nineteenth century regarded education for women as an unimportant matter, designed to produce useful wives and, for those whose social class required, accomplished ladies. Young gentlewomen learned a little needlepoint and embroidery, music, and painting on glass. Latin, Greek, and mathematics were widely believed to overtax women's brains which were too light and had defective reasoning powers. The cultivation of the social graces prevailed for three quarters of a century and dominated the practice of a vast majority of female academies and seminaries until the middle of the nineteenth century.[10]

Louisa May Alcott's coeducational Plumfield boarding school, portrayed in Little Men, differed markedly from the majority of actual nineteenth century male and female academies or seminaries. At Plumfield boys and girls were educated together and girls were prepared for higher education. Louisa's ideas for the education of women were not too unlike those of Plato. Plato said that women were to have the same nurture and education as men. He would have had women taught music, gymnastics, and military exercises with men. Women were to be

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[10]Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education, p. 74; and Oliver Jensen, The Revolt of American Women (2nd ed.; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 107; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 329, 412, II, 192-193, 399.

governed by the same laws as men and have the same pursuits. Plato recommended the same education for the governesses of the republic as for the governors. All this notwithstanding, Louisa did not exclude domestic education and the social graces. They were also very much a part of her curriculum.[11]

During the first half of the nineteenth century the factory system grew in America and a sizable influx of new immigrants came to man the new machinery. Labor unions and workingmen's parties developed swiftly and there was considerable unrest and conflict. The new immigrant from Europe, who provided a supply of cheap labor, proved to be a social problem as well as a capital asset. Horace Mann argued for free public common day schools to accomplish the assimilation of the newcomers and temper social radicalism. The rapidly developing industrial economy made support of compulsory and completely tax supported public education possible through an increased tax base in revenue derived from industrial properties. With the growth of the factory system and the rise of enthusiasm for universal education, the academies and seminaries became the training ground of teachers for the

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[11]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. xvii; and Alcott, Little Men, chaps. vi, vii; and Plato, The Republic, Vintage Books (New York: Random House), Books v, vii.

common schools.[12]

The education of women was closely connected with the common schools. The first great profession for women outside the home was teaching. Louisa May Alcott and the advocates of women's education were not content with teaching, or with a general education. Those associated with the women's rights movement asserted that women should be allowed to enter any occupation or profession that they were qualified for by abilities and preparation.[13]

The late 1960's and 1970's have witnessed a revival of the early women's rights movement in the United States under the title of the "Women's Liberation Movement." The central demands of this later day movement bear striking resemblance to those of the antecedent movement, especially those which focus on equality of educational, occupational, and political opportunity. Since Louisa May Alcott was an early feminist and outstanding example of an unmarried woman who pursued a successful career as a professional writer, her views on the role of women are particularly relevant.

Louisa May Alcott proposed preparing women for careers and independence. Louisa's proposal was socially

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[12]Gutek, An Historical Introduction to American Education, 53; and Karier, American Educational Ideas, pp. 44-45, 60; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 457.

[13]Ibid., II, 321, 342.

relevant since by 1860 there were eight Eastern states in which the excess of women to men was marked. This brought the realization of the fact that home life was no longer a possibility for a large number of women. Society applied the term "superfluous" to these unmarried women. Louisa used the term in the fictitious sewing seminar portrayed in Jo's Boys and depicted spinsterhood as an alternative ~~choice to marriage~~ and not something to be feared. She was not the first to state such views publicly. In about 1800 Eliza Southgate, who was accused of being a disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft, defended woman's right to an education and her right not to marry.[14]

Public sentiment was against women developing any talents and becoming anything other than housewives. Most men and women feared that a college education could harden and deform or destroy womanly nature. It was alleged that women could not do college work and would die in the process. Women were believed mentally inferior and physically weak. It was said that women's brains were too light, their foreheads too small and their reasoning powers too unstable for them to make good students. Louisa May Alcott called these allegations nonsensical and went on to recommend medicine as "true woman's work." This recommendation was not unique and appeared years

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[14]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. xvii; and Alcott, Little Women, chap. ix; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, I, 175-176, II, 1-2.

earlier in 1852 in Godey's Lady's Book, which called medicine the most natural profession for women. It was argued that the care of children and the sick was woman's age-old profession and she should be prepared for it. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of opposition on the part of medical schools, managers of hospitals, and various medical societies to the admission of women.[15]

In Jo's Boys Louisa May Alcott paradoxically portrayed Nan's easy access to a medical education and the general availability of career opportunities for women. The fact is that there were very few women admitted to the medical profession when Jo's Boys was published in 1886, and there still are relatively few. In 1971, some eighty-five years later, statistics reveal that only nine per cent of American physicians are women. In this same year, precedent setting legislation was passed by the House of Representatives of the United States Congress to prohibit federal aid to any medical school practicing sex discrimination.[16] The current controversy concerning unfair hiring and promotional policies and equal pay for equal work makes Louisa's early optimism regarding women's occupational opportunities quite remarkable.

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[15]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. xvii; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, II, 4, 152, 154-155, 342-343, 345.

[16]"Bill bars aid to sex-biased med schools." Chicago Daily News, July 19, 1971, p. 22.

Louisa May Alcott's coeducational liberal arts Laurence College was equally Utopian. There were few, if any, sexually integrated colleges in New England in Louisa's time. Vassar "Female" College was opened in 1865 and Smith and Wellesly were opened in 1875. Harvard set up a women's "annex," later called Radcliffe, and Columbia did the same with Barnard. The major Ivy League colleges were founded by men and women who believed that women would be so intimidated by the presence of men that they could only get an education if they had their own schools. Coeducation was a hot debate in those days and was almost unknown in the Eastern United States.[17]

Nineteenth century coeducationists held the Platonic view that women have like capacities with men, but differ quantitatively. Coeducationists have consistently denied the Aristotelian assertions as to qualitative differences. Denial of qualitative differences left them free to assert the social interdependence of man and woman and they argued that since men and women must live together, they should be educated together. Louisa May Alcott stumped for coeducation on the grounds that it helped polish the men and upgrade their academic

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[17]Bird and Briller, Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down, p. 27; and Jensen, The Revolt of American Women, p. 108; and Mabel Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for American Women (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959), p. 19.

performance.[18]

Sexually segregated and integrated education is still being seriously discussed. Pamela Swift quoted R. R. Dale, professor of education at the University of Wales in England, as having reported that boys are less aggressive and girls less vengeful when educated together. Dale asserted that in sex-segregated schools frustrated sexual drives stimulate aggressive behavior, of which war is the ultimate example. He suggested that if all schools were coeducational the world might be a more peaceful place. Manhattan psychoanalyst Peter Blos favors separation of the sexes in school for a while after puberty and disagrees with arguments that thwarting youth's sexual drive will be harmful. Blos says that there is a profit in repression and sublimation. In The Academic Revolution Christopher Jencks and David Reisman asserted that the presence of women had a benign effect and concluded that women's colleges are probably an anachronism. Mabel Newcomer defended separate women's colleges in A Century of Higher Education for American Women. Newcomer stated that women's colleges are in a position to dramatize the changing needs in the higher education of women and lead

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[18] Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. xvi; and Alcott, Little Men, chap. vii; and Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, II, 224, 249.

in providing for them more so than coeducational institutions.[19]

It is noteworthy that in 1969 Vassar switched to coeducation. George Kannar asserted that Vassar is the leader of the coeducational movement. Kannar reported that John M. Duggan, Vassar's vice president for student affairs, thinks that women stand to gain now that Vassar is coed because men are being sensitized to the idea of intelligent women doing intelligent jobs. Duggan thinks that men with this experience will be more sensitive to what women can do in business and other public affairs. Harvard and Radcliffe have a near-integration of the sexes with a common faculty and largely integrated extracurricular activities, while Columbia and Barnard have adjacent campuses and separate faculties for lower division students.[20]

Louisa May Alcott was an early advocate of coeducation and equality of educational opportunity. Louisa worked for the enfranchisement of women and supported the aims of the women's rights movement of her day; as a feminist she would be in sympathy with the goals of today's

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[19] Christopher Jencks & David Riesman, The Academic Revolution, Anchor Books (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), pp. 299, 310; and Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for American Women, p. 255; and "Postponing Adolescence," Time, November, 1971, p. 60; and Pamela Swift, "Coeducation for Peace," Parade, October, 1971, p. 24.

[20] Jencks and Riesman, The Academic Revolution, p. 300; and George Kannar, "Must Women's Colleges Go Coed to Survive?," Parade, January 17, 1971, pp. 8-11.

"Women's Liberation Movement." The early feminists and our contemporary women's liberationists are in agreement on the need for equality of educational, occupational, and political opportunity.

Louisa May Alcott's Laurence College was open to all colors, creeds, and classes as well as both sexes. There was room for everyone from:

> . . . the shabby youths from up country, the eager girls from the West, the awkward freedman or woman from the South, or the well-born student whose poverty made this college a possibility when other doors were barred.[21]

Laurence College was inclusive to an extent hardly realized at privately endowed institutions in New England during the nineteenth century. The situation has probably changed little since then. Mabel Newcomer reported that in 1910 and 1956 only 1.5 per cent of the students at Vassar were daughters of manual workers. Newcomer noted that neither scholarships nor job opportunities have changed the circle from which Vassar draws. She observed that the college catalogue pictured Negroes as white-capped maids in the dining rooms, or subjects in the nursery school, or being interviewed by sociology students on a field trip.[22]

Louisa May Alcott identified Laurence College as a "little republic" in which the students were prepared

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[21] Ibid., chap. xvii.

[22] Newcomer, A Century of Higher Education for American Women, pp. 13, 144-145.

to play their parts dutifully and responsibly in the larger society. Like Pestalozzi, Louisa saw education as a means of personal and social regeneration through the efforts of individuals. Louisa held that each of us has an inherited set of potentialities, propensities, or dispositions to good or evil. She seemed to see "values" as an integral part of human nature. She asserted that one can cultivate and exercise the good powers to overcome the bad tendencies. She regarded a wholesome environment as essential and recommended the observation and imitation of worthy models--especially the teachers who were to set a good example.[23]

Louisa May Alcott represented education as a means of raising human beings to a social, intelligent, and moral life in her portrayal of Dan. Dan was depicted as reformed through kindness, love, pity, patience, hard personal experience, and the consequences of his misadventures. After serving a prison term and escaping death in a mine disaster, he went to work with the Montana Indians and ultimately died in their defense.[24] Dan's regeneration was in keeping with the spirit of New England Transcendentalism. Bronson Alcott held that education was

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[23]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chap. xvii; and Alcott, Little Men, chaps. iv, vi, x, xxi; and Gutek, Pestalozzi and Education, pp. 34, 59.

[24]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chaps. xii, xx; and Alcott, Little Men, chap. x.

to reveal one's endowments and fit one to use these for renewal and perfection. According to Bronson Alcott and Henry David Thoreau individuals were to know themselves, reform themselves, be better social beings, and act to reform society. Dan's characterization illustrates Louisa's trust in man and the personal and social relevance of her educational ideas.

Dan was educated at Plumfield boarding school which was homelike and characterized by an environment of love and security. Jo and Professor Bhaer were parent surrogates as well as teachers. At Plumfield corporal punishment and rote memorization were rejected in favor of praise and rewards, emotionally vivid games, story-making episodes, and constructive projects. There was no damping down of imagination and visualization in the interest of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. The stress was on activity, especially aesthetic ones such as the writing and recitation of essays, poems, and letters based on personal experience and nature study, and the production of dramatic plays. Louisa May Alcott's emphasis was on intuitive thinking and creative self-expression rather than on vicarious learning through books. Louisa's preference for direct experience and subjective knowledge rather than secondhand experience and abstract knowledge was also evident in her portrayal of Laurence College, which was

characterized by an informal atmosphere.[25] Louisa's emphasis on the self and experience was similar to Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief in the self and his doctrine of full dependence on living.

The aesthetic activities which Louisa May Alcott advocated were much like those recommended by the early twentieth century Progressive educators who emphasized the use of experience and creative self-expression. Van Cleve Morris credited the Progressives for setting a precedent to work from in establishing an Existentialist curriculum. Louisa and the Existentialists recommended experiences in the dance, music, drama, creative writing, painting, and the plastic arts.[26] Like the Existentialists, Louisa sought the learner's own authentic expression of what was seen in the world. Louisa's stress on the development of intuitive powers and imaginative expression coincided with New England Transcendentalist practice. Self discovery and inner development were an

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[25]Alcott, Jo's Boys, chaps. i, xiv, xvii; and Alcott, Little Men, chaps. ii, iv, vii, xii, xvii.

[26]Van Cleve Morris, Existentialism in Education: What It Means (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 125; and Ira Byrd Mosley, The "New Education"--A Study of Origins and Development (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Leland Stanford Junior University, 1939), p. 26. It is interesting to note that Soren Kierkegaard, who is generally regarded as the first major Existential thinker, was a contemporary of the New England Transcendentalists. See George F. Kneller, Existentialism in Education, Science Editions (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), pp. 15-16, 19, 137 for the points of agreement between New England Transcendentalism and Existentialism.

integral part of Bronson Alcott's instructional program. The subjects that Louisa advised be taught had deep personal relevance because they were self-rewarding by the criterion of being "real," "exciting," and "meaningful."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

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Louisa May Alcott lived in New England during the days when the "ladies" of a growing and very conservative bourgeois society were treated with respect and kept "in their place." Very few young "ladies" had any career other than marriage. Women of modest means were employed as school teachers and governesses; poor women worked as domestic servants, or in home industries and factories, while farmers' wives worked from early dawn until after sunset. Genteel "ladies" lived the life of an ornament and the Victorian lady of fashion was generally pale, vaporish, and unhealthy.[1]

Louisa May Alcott was an active and energetic woman who worked as a teacher, governess, invalid's companion, volunteer nurse, domestic servant, and in home industry as a seamstress. She never married though it has been asserted that she had offers. Cheney stated that Louisa had one proposal about which she consulted with her mother, telling her that she did not care for the suitor very much. Louisa's mother is said to have saved

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[1]Jensen, The Revolt of American Women, p. 111.

her from the impulse to self-sacrifice which might have given much needed financial assistance to the Alcott family.[2] Louisa was bound up in her family and work; she was self-reliant and valued her independent spinsterhood.

Louisa started writing in her childhood. She wrote in her "Imagination Book," and in her journals. She was encouraged to do so by her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, and her mother, Abigail May. Cheney opined that Louisa formed the habit of writing freely from the lessons that her father gave her. Louisa composed her first poem when she was eight years old and wrote melodramatic plays and "pot boilers." Stern's bibliography of Louisa's written work runs to two hundred and seventy titles, and includes, besides well-known stories short and long, various non-fictional pieces, poems, plays; and three serious novels for adults: Hospital Sketches, Moods, and Work. Louisa wrote primarily from her own experiences and on various topics such as race relations; woman's rights; hospital conditions; her visits to a prison and an orphanage; temperance, communal living, and education.[3]

Louisa May Alcott portrayed racially integrated education in Little Women and Jo's Boys, and told the story of love between a white woman and a mulatto in "M.L."

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[2]Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 94.

[3]Alcott, Journal, Wednesday, in Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, p. 40; and Cheney, Louisa: Her Life, pp. 20, 50; and Stern Louisa May Alcott, pp. 343-360.

Miss Alcott expressed her views on woman's rights in Jo's Boys through her characterization of Nan, who spoke on the issue of woman's suffrage and who fictitiously realized woman's rights to equal educational and occupational opportunities by becoming a doctor. Louisa told of life and death at the Union Hospital in Georgetown, where she worked as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War, in "Hospital Sketches." She described "A Visit to the Tombs" and told of her sojourn to Randall's Island, a Quaker home for children in New York, in "A New Way to Spend Christmas;" both of these stories were written for The Youth's Companion. She wrote "Letter to N.W.C.T.U." for Our Union and satirized her childhood experience in communal living in "Transcendental Wild Oats--A Chapter from an Unwritten Romance." Louisa voiced her ideas on education in Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys.

Louisa's education was desultory and unsystematic; however, she did have the benefits of instruction by her father and mother, who were teachers, and the advantage of friendship with the illustrious Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. From an early age she was exposed to the theoretical musings of the New England Transcendentalists and shared in the practical expressions of New England Transcendentalism. Louisa was well aware of the consequences of the practice of Idealism from her Civil War nursing experience and her membership in her father Bronson Alcott's unsuccessful attempt at communal living at Fruitlands.

In "Transcendental Wild Oats," published in 1876, Louisa said of the Consociate Family Living failure:

> . . . The world was not ready for Utopia yet, and those who attempted to found it only got laughed at for their pains. In other days, men could sell all and give to the poor, and lead lives devoted to holiness and high thought, and, after the persecution was over, find themselves honored as saints or martyrs. But in modern times these things are out of fashion. To live for one's principles, at all costs, is a dangerous speculation; and the failure of an ideal, no matter how humane and noble, is harder for the world to forgive and forget than bank robbery or the grand swindles of corrupt politicians.[4]

"Transcendental Wild Oats" was a satirical report of Louisa's participation in her father's utopian experiment, in the company of the millennialist Charles Lane and others, at the "New Eden" in Harvard, Massachusetts. Louisa described it as a Pilgrim's Progress, which was as relevant in imagery as Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which Is To Come: Delivered Under the Similitude of A Dream, which was enlisted to support American millennial-utopian dreams.[5]

When one takes Louisa May Alcott's life and close association with the New England Transcendentalists into consideration, and applies Louis Gottschalk's definition of influence as being 'a persistent, shaping effect upon the

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[4]Alcott, "Transcendental Wild Oats," in Whicher, Transcendentalist Revolt, p. 103.

[5]Smith, John Bunyan in America, pp. 100-101.

thought and behavior of human beings,'[6] one cannot help but conclude that Transcendentalism had an impact on Louisa. Although influence "can rarely be established by documentary proof,"[7] one thinks that the effect of the spiritual or moral force of Transcendentalism may be clearly seen in the moralistic episodes Louisa portrayed in Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. One also sees the close similarity between her and the Transcendentalists' heavy emphasis on nature, direct experience, imagination, self-knowledge, self-reform, self-expression, and social reform.

It has already been noted in Chapter Three of this dissertation that Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was a recurrent theme in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys. David E. Smith, in John Bunyan in America, juxtaposed Little Women with Pilgrim's Progress and asserted that:

> . . . the essential theme of . . . Little Women is that the four girls, who played at Bunyan when they were much younger, must now make him an actuality, must 'live' The Pilgrim's Progress . . .[8]

Smith noted that Little Women was full of contradictions and paradoxes and stated that it is probably these paradoxes which have contributed to its perennial popularity. Smith

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[6]Louis Gottschalk, Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method (2nd ed.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 245.

[7]Ibid., p. 254.

[8]Smith, John Bunyan in America, p. 95.

went on to say that the image Little Women created:

> . . . preserved, in fact defined once and for all, the values of the American middle-class home for the period, and it is probable that this is one of the principal reasons why the book has remained a perennial best-seller.9

Smith asserted that Little Women was intended to be as much a "guide to correct social behavior" as Pilgrim's Progress was to be a guide to proper spiritual behavior a generation earlier; he regarded Little Women as an "index of popular taste in manners and morals in the second half of the nineteenth century." Smith identified the March girls as materialists because they dreamed of happy homes and comforts; he asserted that their dreams came true and they attained riches, happiness, and fashionableness through Meg's husband's Horatio Alger-like success, Amy's marriage to Laurie who inherited his wealthy grandfather's estate, and Jo's inheritance of Aunt March's Plumfield. He also noted that the girls saw Heaven as home and implied that this was further proof of their materialism. Mr. Smith concluded by saying that the desire for "conspicuous consumption" and "vicarious leisure" dominated Little Women, and that "all young readers of Miss Alcott's didactic books" would be led "ultimately only as far as the City of Vanity," where, all year round, merchandise is bought and sold; he also inferred that Little Women was written in the "banal and mediocre

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9 Ibid., p. 100.

language of middle-class sentimental piety."[10]

The preceding chapters of this dissertation indicate that this writer is in partial agreement with Smith's analysis and evaluation of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women. One agrees that there are paradoxes and contradictions in Louisa's didactic book and cites these previously identified instances as examples: the paradoxical notions that the presence of the "merry little quadroon" would not have ruined the Plumfield boys school, and that Nan would have had easy access to a medical education; the contradiction between Louisa's father-figure-God found in nature and the paradoxical concept seen in "The Naughty Kitty-Mouse" episode that people create their Gods; and, finally, Alice Heath's contradictory switch from her stated choice of a career to marriage after what seemed to be a relentless demand for education and independence. One also agrees that it is probable that the elements of paradox and contradiction contribute to the books' perennial popularity.

This author also observed that Louisa portrayed a popular taste in manners and morals, an "index"of them so to speak, and that they were presented in the common language of sentimental piety; and one agrees that the values portrayed are among the principal reasons why the book has perennial appeal; however, in contrast to Smith, this writer does not restrict morality to the American

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[10] Ibid., pp. 96, 99-100, 102.

middle-class or to the nineteenth century. Youth is currently looking for moral leadership and commitment to the historic moral habits of truth, sincerity, justice, and love.

One also takes exception to Smith's over simplified identification of the March girls as materialists, and one does not agree that the desire for "conspicuous consumption" and "vicarious leisure" dominate Little Women; this author thinks that simplicity, direct experience, the theme of Pilgrim's Progress, which Smith calls "essential," and the love and trust of both God and man are dominant. One also certainly does not allow for Smith's dogmatic assertion that "all young readers of Miss Alcott's didactic books" would be led "ultimately only" as far as the City of Vanity, especially after having shown in the previous chapters of this examination of Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys that this limited selection of Louisa May Alcott's moralistic books led ultimately to a sexually, racially, and socially integrated educational utopia.

Louisa's sexually, racially, and socially integrated educational utopia would be a community of scholars in which close personal relationships are cultivated among the school personnel and students. It would be privately financed and most in favor of in loco parentis. Learning would be made tangible and abstract principles would become felt; alternatives, bad as well as good, would be put in concrete shapes. The emotional and personal development of the student would

be as important to a teacher as his intellectual development and education would be aimed at changing students' values and behavior. There would be an elective system and the use of independent study, with little emphasis on grades. Evaluation of student progress would be made by means of a critique and be a responsibility shared by the teacher and the students. The student body would include the less advantaged for whom scholarships would be available.

The curriculum would be comprehensive and diverse to meet the needs of students, teachers, and society. It would be carried into student social life by setting up living-centers and by holding seminars. Faculty-student interaction would be encouraged, both formal and informal, inside and outside the classroom; some faculty would live on campus. Learning would not take place entirely in a formal institution, a place physically separate from the rest of life. Theory would not be divorced from practice and the entire community, indeed the whole world, would be an appropriate place for learning. Field-study, work-study, community-action projects, and foreign travel would be included. Interdisciplinary courses dealing with contemporary social problems, intellectual themes, and distinctive human experiences would also be a part of the curriculum.

This study reveals that Louisa May Alcott's educational ideas were subjective as well as idealistic. Much of what Louisa proposed came from her experience as the daughter and student of her father Amos Bronson Alcott and

her mother Abigail May Alcott. Louisa was educated at home and she recommended making the school like a home characterized by love and security. Her education started in her babyhood and her father was involved in her early care and training. In idealistic fashion, her thoughts on education were broad and comprehensive and ranged from early childhood to late adolescence.

In Little Women, Louisa presented the homely amusements and education of Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy March, who ranged in age from girlhood to adolescence. Louisa portrayed the girls' informal education by Marmee who used the "play system" and consequences; Amy's formal education was also depicted. Before Little Women ended, Beth died and her sisters were married and had families of their own. The informal education of their young children was portrayed in Little Women and Little Men. Louisa involved the male family members in the training, discipline, and care of the March grandchildren and portrayed grandfather March "socratizing" with his young grandson Demi. Plumfield boys' boarding school was founded in the concluding chapter of Little Women and was transformed into a coeducational institution in Little Men. Corporal punishment and memorization were rejected at Plumfield where manners and morals were of primary concern. Self-knowledge, self-development, self-help, and self-control were given greater emphasis than the acquisition of abstract knowledge. In Jo's Boys Plumfield became sexually, racially, and socially integrated

Laurence College, a liberal arts institution.

Louisa May Alcott held the notion that each person has a set of propensities or dispositions to good or to evil and she thought that values could be cultivated by example. She recommended value education by the use of models, especially those of the teachers. According to Louisa's idea, the teacher is a moral agent, patient, self-controlled, an individual with a well disciplined mind, a model worthy of emulation. The teacher is to encourage students to develop their own individual talents and interests, whateyer they may be. The teacher is a good person, competent, stimulating, dynamic, vital, and proficient at teaching. The teacher likes teaching and is committed and satisfied. The teacher is a discussant of ideas, educational advisor, career advisor, friend, personal counselor, and parent surrogate.

Louisa laid stress on activities, especially aesthetic ones such as drawing from observation in nature, the writing and recitation of essays, poems, and letters based on personal experience, and the production of dramatic plays. Louisa emphasized experiences which stimulate the creative impulse and bring it to concrete expression. She favored emotionally vivid games, story-telling making episodes, and constructive projects. Her emphasis in composition was not on correct punctuation and syntax, but on imagination and originality of expression. She held that imagination and visualization were not to be damped down in

favor of cognitive learnings. Her emphasis was on intuitive thinking, awareness, consciousness, and creative self-expression.

This study has revealed that Louisa May Alcott's educational ideas are important and are as personally and socially relevant today as they were when she expressed them approximately one hundred years ago. Louisa recommended the cultivation of independence by girls and advocated educational and professional opportunities for women just as today's feminists do. She proposed education for life in a pluralistic society and urged the development of qualities that tests cannot measure: self-discipline and self-reliance. One suggests that perhaps further research of Miss Alcott's writings may provide still other valuable insights into her ideas.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Marie Salwonchik has been read and approved by members of the Department of Education.

The final copies have been examined by the Director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 3, 1972
Date

Gerald Lee Gutek
Signature of Advisor